an earthrise scan of

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WIN-MILL PRODUCTIONS

FOLLOWING CEREBUS

#1
$3.95

Also inside:
SHANNON WHEELER!

Dave Sim & Gerhard interviewed!

Anything Done for the First Time Unleashes a Demon

I. What We're Doing Here

Welcome to the first issue of *Following Cerebus*. Now that Dave Sim's epic comic book story has concluded with the publication of issue 300 in March, those of us who hunger for still more Cerebus-related material have a print outlet to find rare and previously unpublished art and stories, interviews, essays, and letters, plus whatever else comes our way. For some of us, six thousand comic book pages, plus various supplemental material and previously published interviews, are not enough. We want more.

Last August we contacted Dave about his post-300 plans, and whether he might allow us to revive our early-nineties publication *Cerebus Companion*. Although they sold fairly well, only two issues were released (for various reasons too complicated to get into now). We never lost interest in the comic book, but our publishing efforts concentrated on the worlds of *Twin Peaks* and director David Lynch (in *Wrapped in Plastic*, now on issue 70) and film, television, and comic art in general (in *Spectrum*).

After some discussion back and forth, we and Dave agreed that, because this new title would have enough significant differences from *CC*, we would begin the project with a new title and a new first issue.

As with the Lynch-related magazine started in 1992, we do not proclaim ourselves the world's foremost authority on the subject—in this case, *Cerebus*. We've been reading the title almost since the beginning and have spent many hours studying and discussing it, but we haven't memorized every line of dialogue or every panel of art. (We're working our way there, however.) *Cerebus* is a huge, complex, and challenging project, and there will be a lot that readers glean that we have not noticed. That's fine. As these issues of *Following Cerebus* are published (quarterly, at first), we invite others to participate by sending letters, photos, and articles. We'd also like to include convention sketches in upcoming gallery sections if readers will send good-quality photocopies (or e-mail the art to us at 150-resolution).

Two of these "participants," we're elated to say, will be Dave and Gerhard themselves. Both

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Following Cerebus

Vol. 1 #1 (Special 48-page issue!) July 2004

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And Gerhard took the photo!

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***Following Cerebus* produced by**
Craig Miller
&
John Thorne

***Cerebus* comic book by**
Dave Sim
&
Gerhard

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Cerebus may be dead—

—but Dave Sim is still alive and kicking!

Dave Sim's epic Cerebus storyline has come to a close, so of course we were eager to question him about his accomplishment. What better way to kick off the inaugural issue of Following Cerebus?

However, instead of drowning Dave with a flood of inquiries covering all aspects of a six thousand-page story, we purposefully limited this first group to topics that addressed more general themes. There will be time in future issues to ask about panel three of page sixty-two of such-and-such a graphic novel. This time around, we were concerned with talking about the big picture—the overriding issues and arcs that dominate the series. While we may have occasionally slipped in a more detail-specific question, we tried to keep it to a minimum.

Fortunately, Dave will be back next issue (and, we hope, the issue after that), so in time we'll get everything covered. It took Dave twenty-six years to tell the Cerebus story; Following Cerebus *will not be able to address all of the topics and get all of the questions answered in a couple of issues. As with our coverage of David Lynch and* Twin Peaks *in* Wrapped in Plastic *and* Buffy the Vampire Slayer *in* Spectrum, *we see our publications as more analogous to marathons than to sprints. We invite our readers to sit back comfortably and settle in for a relaxing visit. We promise things won't get boring.*

The following interview was conducted via fax on May 21 and 22. Considering that Dave is ostensibly "retired" from Cerebus, *we were elated that he took the time to answer in such detail. As always, our thanks.*

FC: Why an aardvark? And what does "something fell" refer to? Just kidding! Here are the real questions:

It sounds as if you've been as busy as ever, even though you're ostensibly in "retirement"? Have the months since the completion of Cerebus *300 been anything like you thought they would be?*

Sim: Yes, as it turns out, I have been as busy as ever, which has sort of snuck up on me. It was only last week that I realized that I was starting to answer the mail at 6 a.m., and that I was usually still working come 10 p.m. Part of that is the prayer times at this time of year. I'm getting up at 5 a.m. for the pre-dawn prayer, and I really should be getting up even earlier. Towards the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere, the hour when you can first differentiate a white thread from a black thread is closer to 4 a.m. than 5, and the sunset prayer takes place around 8:45 p.m., which puts the last prayer—when the final rays of light have faded—at nearly 10 p.m. So, I'm ending up getting only about five or six hours sleep a night.

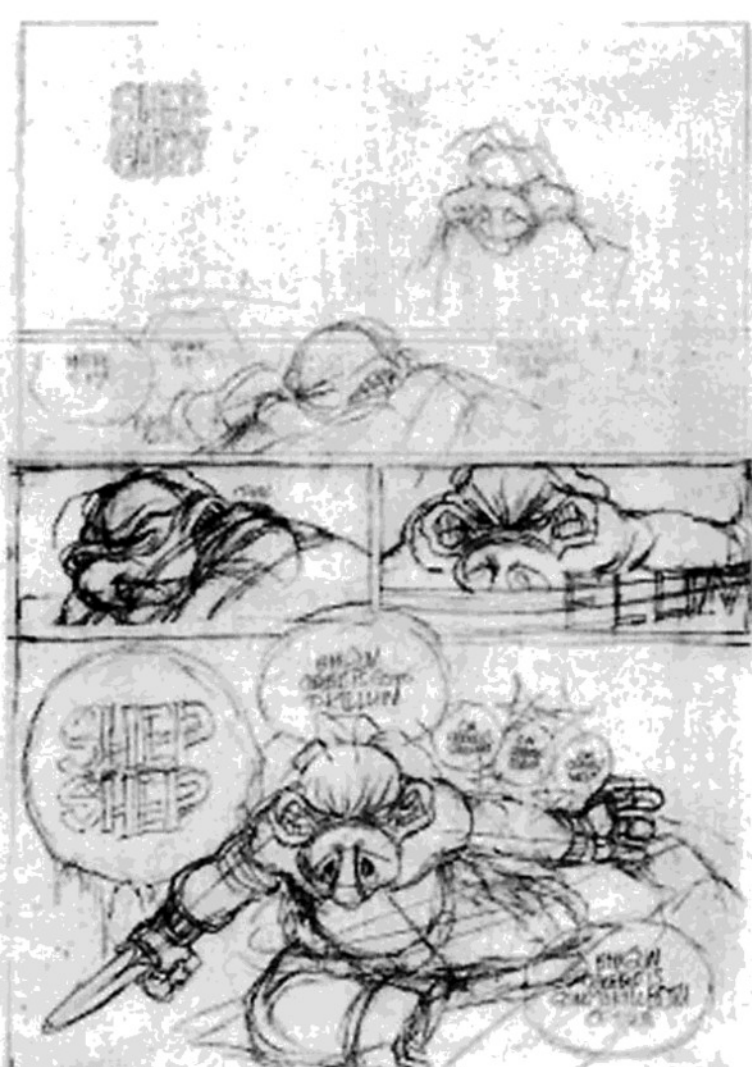
I guess I should've expected a bit of a surge in the mail after issue 300, but I really didn't. I thought by the time the middle of May rolled around, I would have most of the day to myself, and instead I'm answering the mail pretty much fifteen hours a day. It's like the world's longest press conference. I do think that an author owes it to his own material and his readership to be as forthcoming about his work as he can be—in my case if only because the project was so lo-ong. There's a lot to explain. And it is an interesting way to make a living and to spend my day. It's all trafficking in ideas, and ideas are my currency of choice. I think people will see what I'm talking about when *Collected Letters 2004* comes out, hopefully sometime next year. I'm on my fourteenth "save as" file on the computer of fifty pages each, so I'm up around seven hundred manuscript pages. Because I know it's going to be published at some point, I'm answering the questions pretty thoroughly on the same theory as the *Guide to Self-Publishing*. If you can explain it once in print, that can save you having to explain it fifty times in conversation. There's also the fact that our present society refuses to grow up and leave feminism behind, so a lot of what I'm doing is just "reading into the record" for the sake of future society when there comes the first generation that has grown up and left feminism behind. In corresponding with the *Cerebus* readership, I'm able to socialize in a more sensible and ideas-oriented world completely at variance with the one that I physically live in. And I think the same is true on their parts. They get to live in a little pocket of reality that makes sense while they're reading my letters and while they're responding to them. And then they go back out on stage and pretend to be feminists.

FC: When you announced (in 1980, I believe) that Cerebus *would run for three hundred issues, what odds did you give yourself that you would actually complete the six thousand-page project? (In* Cerebus *186, you present a few of the ways that it could have been derailed.)*

DS: I'm not sure how I would handicap that.

On the one hand, I was reasonably certain that I would make it to issue 300 because it was too sensible an approach not to work. That was the beauty of it that appealed to me right away: that it was the perfect way for a comic-book artist to structure a big chunk of his life. Face it: you're going to spend decades working anyway, whatever it is that you choose to work on. This way, you end up with one long story that you have literally two decades to mentally figure out—an unbelievably luxurious and relaxed pace for a writer to work at—with all of the cachet that goes with having rare early issues and sentimentally-attractive seminal work. First Jaka issue, first Elrod, first mention of Palnu, first Roach—all the sorts of things that get mentioned in the price guides which appeals to the historian and the stock market player. And you get to retire in your late forties. So, all things being equal, it's as close to a creative cakewalk as you can hope to get. This was prob-

ably one of the first breaks with my own society where I looked on my choices as sensible and worthwhile and relatively easy—compared with having to always be wondering where my next job was coming from—while the world looked at them as insane and self-evidently doomed and excruciatingly difficult.

I'm not sure if it's even part of people's thinking in this day and age, but for the guys of my generation, John Lennon getting shot in 1980 was very disheartening. John Kennedy when I was seven, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy when I was twelve, and Lennon when I was twenty-four. I remember Mike Friedrich telling me early in '81 about going to see Stan Lee at one of his personal appearances, and this fan stood up and started ranting about how comics weren't funny anymore. And Mike thought—being of my generation—this is it. The guy's going to pull out a gun and shoot Stan Lee, because comics aren't funny anymore. That was the mindset we all lived with. We'll probably all end up shot. Everyone we admire will end up shot. It literally seemed more likely in 1981 that I would get shot by an irate fan than that I would live to old age. I suspect that was just the baby-boomer time period, and the further along I got, the more I realized that there are "fame-based economies of scale" involved. I remember Joe Matt being worried about a fan at one point a few years back, and I said, "Joe, you aren't *famous* enough to shoot. None of us are. Robert *Crumb* isn't famous enough to shoot. You don't accept life imprisonment with no chance of parole as a trade-off so you can see your face on the front page of the *Comics Buyer's Guide.*" But, there is—or was—a strange societal undercurrent effect of television and the assassinations in the sixties that created the impression that you were *likely* to get shot to death or *likely* to get hit by a bus or *likely* to die from some form of terrible violence. It took a great deal for me to convince myself—even though common sense told me that it was true—that most people don't die violent, untimely deaths. One of the phrases that got

Rough layout to finished art: the final page of Cerebus *299*

me through was, "They can kill you, but they can't eat you," which gives you an idea of just how deeply-rooted extreme fatalism had become that, as a baby-boomer, "They can kill you, but they can't eat you" was as optimistic as I could safely allow myself to be. I do think that sixties mindset had a profound effect on society such that—when I announced it in 1979—it seemed unnatural for someone to plan to do something for twenty-six years. Seventy years ago, if you found a steady job, you would stick with it for twenty-six years just because there was no telling when or if you would find another one. I was a real throwback in that way. Slow and steady wins the race, whereas most of my generation was jumping around from place to place. "You better grab all the gusto and life experience that you can wherever you can find it, because you'll probably get shot to death."

FC: In issue 183, you suggest that the story will end in issue 200 instead of 300. Two pages later, you say, "Just kidding." And yet the story <u>does</u> rush toward a conclusion in issue 200, as if you were squeezing material planned for many issues into just a few issues. Were you hedging your bets, with the idea that you could come up with a new storyline and a new beginning with issue 201? (Interestingly, there is a similar "rush" toward a conclusion as issue 300 nears.)

DS: Does the story rush to a conclusion in issue 200? I mean, that's an interesting impression to have. I would say that there was a lot of groundwork that needed to be established—more than I really thought when I started developing it. I needed *High Society* for the overall venue, *Church & State* to establish who the factions were, and then the break for *Jaka's Story* and *Melmoth,* which were closer to pure narrative. "Pogrom's Progress," the *Jaka's Story* chapter title, summed it up. I've set everything in motion for the complete Cirinist takeover, and you're going to see about as much of it as you do of the Nazis in *Cabaret,* because that's exactly the point. And then *Mothers & Daughters,* which is going to show the takeover and explain the takeover at the same time, and then I finally arrive at the dialogue between Cerebus and myself, which brings the storyline back to the title character to determine the emphases of the last third of the total storyline. As I've said before elsewhere, I rehearsed for my side of the dialogue with Cerebus, but I didn't allow myself to think what he was going to be interested in, what his reaction was going to be, until I got to the point where it was his turn, so that I could "method act" his reaction. It's a bit misleading to discuss what followed as "a new storyline and a new beginning" with issue 201. It was the same storyline. He was coming back to earth to his favorite tavern near the Wall of Tsi, eventually Rick was going to turn up to start the Cerebite religion, and that was going to engulf him. But the emphases and the "orbital" characters and the tone hadn't been established in my mind, because Cerebus' reaction in our dialogue was going to establish those. It's a very loose framework: favorite tavern, Rick turning up, Cerebite religion. The fact that he was only interested in Jaka set a lot of the desolate-but-humorous tone. The thriving "block that rocks" near the Wall of Tsi that he pictured on Juno in his mind's eye from memory turns out to be this one desolate remnant of a tavern that only has unlimited alcohol to recommend it. Metaphorically, from my own overview, that seemed like a good way to represent to him what sort of a life you're going to have if you're that obsessive about one chick. His level of interest wasn't rich enough to incarnate or sustain any physical environment more interesting than that. It's, literally, all that he deserved. It was actually *more interesting* than he deserved. That was the metaphorical purpose of the luxurious bartender's quarters that he only discovers

when he's getting ready to leave. "You aren't even curious enough to ask where the bartender lives. Even when you're living there by yourself and *you're*

"It's a bit misleading to discuss what followed as "a new storyline and a new beginning" with issue 201. It was the same storyline."

the bartender, with nothing to do all day, you're not even curious enough to walk upstairs and see what's there." That metaphor is finally closed off with the flight of stairs in his suite in *The Last Day* that is just a decorative touch and goes straight into a wall. At the start of *Guys,* I could literally have put him in a cardboard box and said, If you sit there and be good for eight years, Jaka will come back to you. And he would've sat there and have been good for eight years. That would probably have been a more accurate resonance than the *Guys* storyline—Cerebus sitting in a cardboard box being good for eight years. You think the book got bad reviews as it was, try doing that for twenty issues!

There is definitely sudden action that takes hold at various points in the storyline and accelerates it. I don't think that's especially true of 200 and 300. *Flight* starts off with a bang. I knew what a relief *Flight* came as to the readers because I won a Harvey Award. I seriously think I got the Harvey Award as Best Cartoonist that year because prior to that point, people were genuinely afraid that Cerebus was going to be sitting out front of Dino's Café clutching Missy for the next 150 issues. That, and the Brothers Hernandez were suffering the inevitable backlash, and Dan Clowes was becoming ascendant, which split the Fantagraphics vote.

Preliminary drawing of elderly Cerebus

FC: In an interview long ago, someone asked you what you would do after issue 300, and you said something like, "I hope never to have to draw Cerebus again." And just a few months after 300, along comes Following Cerebus *with a new cover drawn by you. Can you ever forgive us?*

DS: Ask me after we auction the cover on eBay. I might have to thank you guys instead.

FC: Cerebus may be unique as a single story told by a single author over a twenty-six year period. (Hal Foster's Prince Valiant *may be the closest relative.) As you were working out the story early on, did you account for the fact that you could (and probably would) be a very different person ten, fifteen, twenty years later, and plan accordingly (as best you could) so that the early portions might not be undercut later on? Or did you hit certain pre-planned parts of the narrative and suddenly realize, "I have no interest in doing this the way I'd always intended"?*

DS: To your Hal Foster example, I would have to add Lynn Johnson with *For Better or Worse.* Three Canadians. *Gasoline Alley,* the characters all grew up, but I think there were several artists on that one. It also depends on how you define "story," which is why I tend to use the term "narrative." *Prince Valiant* and *For Better or Worse* have more of a staccato quality because of the nature of the comic strip as opposed to the comic-book medium. Comic-strip rhythms are all pretty much the same because each tiny segment has to be able to stand alone to a certain degree in that day's paper, and there's a lot of recap and redundancy. I'm actually reading *Little Orphan Annie* in *Comics Revue* because of Chester Brown's enthusiasm for it. It requires, structurally, something even more than the proverbial "willing suspension of disbelief"— it requires the "willing suspension of narrative expectation." You have to just take it as a given that in the space of three pages, Daddy Warbucks is going to say the same thing five different times and usually to Annie, who never says, "Gloryosky, Daddy. You awready tol' me that four times!" In any other narrative form—a play, a novel, or a short story—there is no way you could get away with one character saying the same thing five times in the space of fifteen minutes. So, to me, comic strips present a kind of story, but they're incapable of actual narrative.

The way that I planned for the changes I anticipated that I was going to go through as I got older was to attempt a straight line rising up to the truth where I would jettison anything that wasn't working as soon as I found something preferable to it, always trying to find more accurate metaphors for what I saw as reality on the assumption that I would end up closer to the truth at the end than I had been at the beginning. That is, I actively set out to undercut—or, rather, supersede—the early portions as I went along. Suenteus Po playing chess seemed a more accurate metaphor for reality than the Judge just observing everything on the moon. Suenteus Po's perception of reality hinging on the interactions of key personalities as chess pieces and their actions as chess moves is more useful, at least on the

individual level, than the Judge's capsule descriptions of entire epochs in the life of the earth, although I could write two interesting arguments favoring each respective viewpoint, I think. Po's view is less all-encompassing, but it at least seems more accurate for all that. And it's the most basic chess game possible—something I wanted to do that Lewis Carroll had failed at with *Through the Looking Glass,* which is also based on an actual chess match, but a couple of the moves don't make sense. Alice as a pawn passes a knight without capturing it, as I recall—again, indicating that Cerebus is a bad choice for these sorts of encounters: the Judge was rooting for Weisshaupt, and Suenteus Po beats Cerebus in three moves.

The Three Stooges as the Three Wise Fellows

Because I never wrote anything down until it was actually time to start the next book, there was never a carved-in-stone approach that I would have to rebel against in such a way that would be implied—or that I would infer—from "I have no interest in doing this the way I'd always intended." It's comparable to the difference between finishing one jigsaw puzzle and starting the next one. There is very little spontaneity and room to improvise in the former case. The satisfying part is just fitting the last few pieces together. *Starting* a jigsaw puzzle, the satisfaction comes from finding similarly colored pieces and putting them into roughly the right area, making the first organizational decisions to bring some order to the chaos. All the sky pieces here, all the roadway pieces there. Intent is such a minor part of the process in the early stages that it's completely overshadowed by the on-going decision-making. How do I establish who these characters are? What episodes are going to establish their natures in such a way as to move the story forward? There's more room to improvise a scene—like in the beginning of issue 251 that establishes the nature of the Ernestway's marriage—while you're trying out different scenes and different emphases to make other points than there is in the middle of issue 264 when everything needs to get tied off in a satisfying way. In the beginning, there's plenty of room and plenty of time, or there seems to be, until you find out that you have this interminable African sequence to fit in. But that seemed to suit the intensity of the story—the meandering anecdotal approach before really getting down to brass tacks in the tiny panels. *To o* intense to be enjoyed at the time, but more gratifying for that in retrospect. I just seem to have the kind of personality that does my best work when I'm under the gun, and I think I'm losing control over the story and have to fight my way back in. That was the Africa sequence, all right. The rushing headlong quality that you saw at issues 200 and 300, I see as entering the story only in flashback form in the first part of *Form&Void* but which (I think) served to explain the Ernestways—and male/female relations in general—and "where it all went wrong" both in 1953 and in our own time period.

To me, doing a graphic novel was always a matter of spinning out threads for the first half and then tying them off in the second half. I usually didn't introduce a thread unless I had a rough idea of how it would ultimately get tied off except in the interests of trying to do a real life, since all the real lives I know of have no shortage of "untied-off" threads. I did try to limit those, however. It's just too convenient to do a cool idea that comes into your head that has no practical application to the story if you really let yourself *completely* off your own narrative leash. In extreme

cases, it's been known to lead directly to Tim Burton films.

FC: The early work emphasizes the conflict between followers of Tarim and Terim; later there is a struggle between God and Yoohwhoo that closely resembles—or at least is analogous to—Tarim/Terim. Was the original plan to present Tarim/Terim throughout?

DS: I was definitely of the God-and-Goddess school when I started out. "As above, so below." We've got two genders down here; they must have two genders up there. QED. The clearest difference between Tarim/Terim and God/YHWH is the disparity between the names. In the first case they're only off by one letter, so you have one sort of philosophy at work there—very close to the notion of interchangeability, which I see as the fundamental perversion represented by feminism. Man, woman, what's the difference? God, Goddess, what's the difference? Everything and everyone is basically the same as everything and everyone else. All roads lead to Rome. All cats are black at night. All things being equal. All truth being relative. Until you understand that there is a definite war of vested interests going on, those are all very realistic-sounding phrases. So, yes, my original intention as a secular humanist and an atheist would have been to stake out a scrupulous middle-of-the-road course in trying to balance Tarim and Terim—taking the secular humanist and atheistic conceit that man created God and, in effect, writing a co-equal female God into the story—and giving them equal weight and importance. It really is the foundation of liberalism played out to its absolute extreme. Thesis, Antithesis: Synthesis.

Which is interesting in its own way and is certainly the 21st century liberal lifestyle of choice: reducing life to one simple two-step philosophy, but, to me, it's self-evidently ridiculous when you attempt to apply it to ethics. I mean, how does that work? Good, Evil: Gevil? Or Good, Evil: Evood?

"I always knew that the backgrounds would at least be really, really good, and usually a lot better than that."

FC: We're still confused about the void/light theme. At the end of Church & State, *the Judge talks about the "male void" and the "female light." Much later,* Reads *inverts that to "male light" and "female void," though the theme changes from physics to psychology and creativity. So are both true, but from different perspectives? Or are both false? If we're reading* The Last Day *correctly—and it's very possible that we are not—it comes down on the side of the Judge. Or is this simply because the theme has moved back (in part) to physics? Or are we just totally confused?*

DS: You're just totally confused. Next question.

Sorry, little joke there. This is going to be more than a little long-winded, so I apologize in advance. Let me cut to the chase and then try to double back and elaborate. There is a certain amount of inversion and transposition that takes place, I think, when you deal in physical incarnation, which we all do. The physical world is subject to *x* number of demonstrable physical laws, so as physical beings, we tend to perceive only in physical terms. When someone says "light," you think of something physical. It's dark, and you can't see, and then it's light, and you can see. This was my only frame of reference as an atheist. I could come up with the insight that the light as described in the first chapter of the First Book of Moshe could be a prototypical star—which is the major insight at the end of *Church & State* which I retained throughout my three tries at the Origin of Everything—but that still left me over in Stephen Hawking atheistic territory: "I know what the Universe is doing, I just don't know why it's doing it." A prototypical star, fine. But, why? Why did the prototypical star come into being? The conclusion that I gradually came to in reading and re-reading the Bible is that there are declensions of light:

Spirit is light. Soul is light. Awareness is light. Thought is light. Energy is light. Radiation is light. Heat is light. Fire is light. I gradually came to see them as descending levels of how light incarnates—as it says in John 1 of the true light—"the light that lighteth every man that commeth into the world." The atheistic mind draws a blank at the suggestion that there is a profound distinction between ordinary light and true light. To the atheistic mind there is only light and darkness, whereas, I think it's safe to say that physical light—light as we conceive of it through our ocular organs, our eyes, in tandem with our brain—*is* darkness, relative to the true light, because true light implies a dramatically higher state of existence than spirit, a state which I would consider to be Faith in God. Genuine Faith in God is the true light.

So, moving from the exalted to the mundane, it's only at the "bottom" two levels of incarnation that light becomes apparent in the physical world. As an example, you can't *see* spirit (although, according to Kurt Cobain, you can *smell* teen spirit: which is keenly observed, to me. Perhaps the last keen observation we will ever get out of rock 'n' roll) or soul or awareness or thought or energy or radiation (except on a cosmological scale). You can't *see* heat, but you can feel it. You can *see* and

feel fire, which is the most degraded and unstable form of light. So, I think, to whatever extent there can be said to be a universal light state—an essential light nature that all forms of light possess across the full reality spectrum from all physical realms in which it incarnates to all spiritual realms in which it incarnates—that universal light state has separated from its own "highest end" self—faith in God—and, as a result, has misinterpreted itself and decided that it *is* God.

In the literal Koin Greek interpretation of John 1—that I just—synchronistically—got from David Wayne Johnson—in the beginning, the Word was "toward God," which certainly fits my thesis more accurately than the more conventional translation of "with God." If I'm right in my origin story in 289/290, a lot of dust being crushed into one spot and the spirit of God going "in unto it" is the point of incarnation. But, it seems to me that incarnation is very different from creation and very different from creating. Releasing the energy housed within a lot of dust by compressing that dust doesn't mean that you created the light. You caused it to incarnate physically, which I assume is a lesser state than pure awareness or spirit and a far lesser state than faith in God. For those who like that sort of thing, that's just the sort of thing they like. But it does, in my view, lead to inherent confusion, because incarnating physically removes you—or removes part of you—from the realm of spirit and gives you the misguided impression that you are all that exists. Which, for the seriously misguided, is a good "close enough for government work" working definition of God. So faith in God erodes into faith in self. The light—that is, light in general—believes itself to be God. I assume that God does not incarnate physically and as a result has a far greater understanding of physical incarnation (as well as a more multi-leveled understanding of all higher states of existence) than does the light simply because a non-eroded, non-physical state implies greater overview. God exists in the higher states of existence, and the light exists in the lower states of existence—all the way down to the physical. This, to me, is the state of existence which the relationship between men and women *metaphorically represents,* and which I have been expelled from society for identifying as such: Men exist on a higher plateau overall, and women exist on a lower plateau overall, in the exact ratio by which fire is not radiation, and radiation is not awareness, and awareness is not spirit, and spirit is not faith in God, and faith in God is not God. There's a pecking order. If you incarnate physically, as light has, you only go up "so high." If you don't incarnate physically, you implicitly exist in a higher state of reality. Put another way, if you incarnate physically, your knickers are showing.

So, to return to your question, the problem results from my secular humanist and atheistic self attempting to create a co-equivalency between maleness and femaleness in my first two tries. It's a natural mis-

Konigsberg (Woody Allen) and New Joanne sketches

take and easy to accomplish. If you eliminate God and faith in God from the equation—which secular humanism and atheism both do—then what you are left with are very nebulous metaphorical qualities inherent in light which exist only in proximities of the "next level down" from faith—of thought and awareness and perception. On the female side, beauty, attractiveness, desirability. On the male side, ideas, thought and conceptualizing, and the misguided perception that the two sides are, more or less, co-equivalent. And because the former state, beauty, is literally more real than the latter state, intelligence—you can tell at a

glance that a woman is beautiful, you can't tell at a glance if a man is intelligent—in a physical sense, you do end up with an increased level of emphasis on physical attractiveness *as* reality, as the highest imaginable *state* of reality which, in turn, imperils *interest in* accurate perceptions which pretty much guarantees that you will end up perceiving inaccurately or cosmetically (which really amount to the same thing): beauty *is* only skin deep and is "dying on the vine" in the cosmological sense even while you're looking at it.

(A quick but, I think, relevant digression which might lose almost everyone reading this but clarify my meaning for those who can take a hairpin turn:)

In other words, the highest conception of existence in secular humanist and atheistic terms becomes the Kennedy White House, which is why the legacy of Kennedy continues to haunt the Democratic party. Because they are atheistic by nature, their awarenesses don't go any higher than physical incarnation, so they're locked into a permanent state of attempting to recreate Kennedy as their physical tribal totem. Youthful with good hair and a nice smile and from Massachusetts if possible. Jimmy Carter, Mike Dukakis, Gary Hart, Bill Clinton, John Kerry. The ideas come well down on the list, because cosmetics *are* the reality once you eliminate God and faith in God. To that sensibility, the fact that the electorate first meets Bill Clinton as a philandering husband in the Gennifer Flowers scandal helps rather than hurts him—brings him closer to the Kennedy template. All he has to do is to not get caught at it.

Latter Days *preliminary art*

You ask, "So are both true, but from different perspectives? Or are both false?" Well, as I say, if you eliminate God and faith in God from the equation, then you do end up with a rough—albeit inherently weird—co-equivalency in all things, as I think we can see everywhere in liberal democratic society today. If you eliminate God and faith in God, then my first two attempts at the Origin of Everything are probably as true as anything else in the same sense that the *Survivor* TV show is called reality TV (without quotation marks), and atheists tend to nod agreeably when Alan Moore tells them that all stories are true. If you include God and faith in God, then they're both false. And ridiculously so.

And I think it depends on what you mean by false. I mean, is it false of the Democrats to always be so insistent that their candidate for President of the United States *has* to look like John F. Kennedy (John Kerry, sad to say, looks like the bastard offspring of JFK and Ed Muskie) in order to get the nomination? It doesn't seem especially *wise* to hold as a central guideline for selecting a leader (presumably someone who doesn't look youthful or have nice hair or a nice smile could still have other qualities of value in the Oval Office) but, then, cosmetics have superseded ideas long, long ago on the Planet of the Democrats and Their Strangely-Hued Secular Humanist Sky, because their ideas only go up as high as their ideology, which isn't very high at all when you cap it with the feminist given of male and female interchangeability. If you are actually talking about *leadership*, Ted Sorenson's speeches, at this late date of dispassionate retrospect—seem a lot more interesting than John F. Kennedy himself. Full of holes, of course—high-minded rhetoric can serve as a kind of theatrical make-up for bad intellectual skin, and for Kennedy, Sorenson's speeches often served that exact purpose—but the high-minded rhetoric is at least a *basis* upon which you could begin to discuss ideas—as unlikely as that would be for Democrats after they contracted their terminal case of feminism in the early seventies.

In my former life as a secular humanist and an atheist, I understood the motivation implicitly. We had gotten higher than we had ever before between 1960 and 1963 in some way that we didn't necessarily understand but which we wanted (and, for many of us, still want) to return to. And it always seems that the best way to return to the past is to replicate the cosmetics we remember being attached to it to whatever extent that's possible—a kind of incantation and invocation—and

hope that we'll just sort of find ourselves back "up there" again.

It's really "Stairway to Heaven" stuff. The ironic secular humanist acknowledgment that you can't *buy* a "Stairway to Heaven" (what sort of idiots do you take us for?) in no way ameliorates for secular humanists that they are aware that an "up there" exists and that getting "up there" involves some manner of "stairway" or "Stairway." In my own case, I wondered if there wasn't a *metaphorical* "way up." Was it possible to tell a story that was long enough and exact enough in proximities of the intent as to accomplish the intent itself to create a stairway by writing and drawing about it? This was the motivation behind making the historical "ascensions" and "Ascensions" a centerpiece of Cerebus' world.

Of course, it all seems very funny to me now in retrospect. It seems clear to me, now, that "up there" is faith in God itself and, consequently, there's no "stairway" to faith in God and no "up there" *per se.* "Up there" is actually "in here" if you have faith or "not in here" if you don't have faith. Faith in God is a choice and a state of existence, not a destination. You have faith in God, then you are already as "up there" as you can hope to get—not in a hierarchical sense, but in terms of having "ascended" above the illusory and the physical. If you genuinely have faith in God, your knickers aren't showing anymore. If you don't have faith in God, then you are just "down there," stuck in your physical incarnation until the machinery runs down. Your knickers are showing.

It seems to me that the conclusion that I came to—and which God graciously allowed me to blindly circumvent and trip over for close to twenty years—is the same obvious conclusion that is present *to* and present *within* all of his creations. Have faith in God. In that there is no hierarchy. The choice is always right there and the potential for transformation, for exponential improvement is immediate.

Sheshep preliminary sketch

I told you it would be a long-winded answer. I should put an "intermission" in the middle of the next one.

FC: *Jaka's Story was an early extended experiment in integrating large (well, it seemed like "large" at the time) chunks of prose within a comic book format. (Of course, the "Mind Games" issues did this on a more limited scale.) Had you intended from early on to incorporate text and comics, or was this something that evolved?*

DS: The text pieces in *Jaka's Story* were the best solution I could manage to the problem that there is only so much content that you can get into a five hundred-page comic book. In the frame of reference of the series of Russian novels I *hoped* I

"I attempted to imitate the majesty of the great Russian novels."

was producing, I had certainly been interested in doing a large piece of pure narrative like one of those extended digressions you would get in one of Dostoevsky's novels, where he tells you someone's complete history, and *while* he's telling you, you have no idea *why* he's telling you until it hooks up with the rest of the story—which, by the time I was coming to the end of *Church & State,* I was beginning to realize was pretty much impossible to do outside of a Russian-sized novel. So one of the things that I attempted to do was to find a kind of mid-point between *The Idiot* and *Lara's Theme* from *Dr. Zhivago.* That was where the sound of the title came from. *Lara's Theme: Jaka's Story.* Whoever wrote *Lara's Theme,* to me, came up with a very good two-word distillation of the tone of the romantic side of the great Russian novels. *Lara's Theme.* So I just stole that distillation. *The Idiot* is roughly five hundred pages long and *Lara's Theme* is about, what? Three minutes and twenty seconds. So, yes. About halfway between those. Had I attempted to tell the whole story in comics form, it would've been about nine hundred pages, and I didn't have that kind of room. But to just do Jaka in the here-and-now would have violated the Russian novel tone that I was going for—where you tell someone's *entire* history. And then I attempted to imitate the majesty of the great Russian novels by having Oscar write about Jaka's childhood in the same "over the top" voice that Wilde used in his Fairy Tales—prose so purple it's an iridescent lavender, so ornate that it has the same kind of irritating majesty that Napoleon's commissioned paintings do. I wrote it intentionally so it wouldn't work. It was just too intrusive, interrupting the pure narrative I was doing on the comics side. But, the idea was that this would resonate with the reader's identification with Jaka. It *is* intrusive and not *just*

in "*Jaka's Story* the graphic novel" sense but in the larger "Jaka's story the human being entitled to privacy" sense: intruding into someone else's life in a way that's none of our business. Rick has violated his own wife's confidences in providing a writer with the equivalent of a tabloid journalism bestseller, like Capote with *In Cold Blood*. You can pretend that you're still in the "quality lit biz," that you're pioneering a form which marries journalism and a high-end novel, but that's just a lot of misdirection to mask your own greed: people are going to buy it because it's a salacious murder story that appeals to their own worst natures. You're doing the same thing that your own "high-brow" faction sneered at "low-brow" Henry Luce for doing with *Time* magazine: dressing up current events in fictional narrative forms. It was interest-

"Suenteus Po playing chess seemed a more accurate metaphor for reality than the Judge."

ing to see if that was what I was doing and hiding from myself: writing a bestseller that was only disguised as "quality lit." The *Cerebus* volume still outsells *Jaka's Story* by a wide margin. It was only as an amateur that I was able to write a bestseller.

FC: A close reading of the Po/Cerebus chess match in Flight shows that (a) it was, indeed, a real chess game, and that (b) Po beats Cerebus quickly and easily—in fact, if memory serves, the fastest checkmate possible in chess. Did you or do you play a lot of chess?

DS: I used to play a lot of chess, every lunch hour when I was in high school. Since then, maybe a dozen games at the most.

FC: Was the quick victory intended to show that Cerebus was __way__ out of his league on this plane (only a chess beginner makes the terrible moves Cerebus makes), or simply required to get the story moving along (or both, or neither)?

DS: It was certainly intended—as a story point—to show that Cerebus was way out of his league, but it also, I hoped, functioned as an acknowledgment of what I considered to be the self-evident reality for which Cerebus and the Cerebus storyline were a metaphor. Remember, I'm still, in my mind, playing the "Stairway to Heaven" game at that point. Assuming, as I did at that time, that I'm the title character in my own life the way Cerebus is the title character in his comic book, by means of the chess match what I am saying to (as I would have seen it at that time) that individual or those individuals whose place or Place in the real world hierarchy relative to my own mirrors the hierarchical relationship between Cerebus and myself—Cerebus is to Dave Sim as Dave Sim is to (fill in the blank)— what I am saying to (fill in the blank) is, let's extrapolate another layer here. Cerebus is to Suenteus Po as Suenteus Po is to Dave Sim. Therefore Dave Sim is to (fill in the blank) as (fill in the blank) is to (fill in The Blank). That is, let's scale the whole thing up a layer and see what that does as a counterpoint to the tinier and tinier Cerebuses which Cerebus extruded attempting to get "up there"—which I had patterned on the solar system, assuming that whatever system I was functioning within in the invisible world would tend to have an analogous structure. Again, "as above, so below". And in terms of the scale involved, I assumed that I was more of a Venus or Mars than a Jupiter or a Saturn. I was a small "chunk of rock" planet addressing myself to a gas giant. Or perhaps the sun. Who could know? Maybe I was just an asteroid or a meteorite (mirroring the tiny Cerebuses). One way or the other (I was saying through the storyline) I think I'm safe in saying that relative to whomever I'm addressing (Mr. Fill in The Blank, Sir) my situation relative to whomever I'm addressing is metaphorically somewhere on the scale between one of the tiny extruded Cerebuses and Dave Sim.

And, I was further acknowledging, You win. Whomever you are, because of the scale involved, if I try to finesse you, or fool you or out-flank you or bypass you, I'm just going to make myself look like an idiot and get my ass kicked (but good) into the bargain. If we were to go head-to-head in a metaphorical chess game (and chess does seem like the perfect metaphor in such a hierarchical construct), I assume that I would be toast in three moves because of what I saw as the metaphorical scale involved.

Of course all this just seems funny in retrospect. The most obvious question from (Fill in The Blank) would be, Why do you want to be "up here" if you realize that "up here" is way out of your league? Put another way: if Suenteus Po could play such an immaculate game of chess that he had earned the right to enter Dave Sim's world, what would he do there? What sort of a life could a two dimensional black-and-white comic book character have in a three-dimensional technicolor world? I tackled this point a number of times and a number of ways, some oblique and some funny. Like Oscar's meeting with "Lord Julius" where he tries to give him his card, "Just in case...." Like me giving my card to Queen Elizabeth. Just in case. I'll bite: what do you see as a likely scenario where Queen Elizabeth would say, "*This* looks like a job for...Dave Sim!"?

It's misguided because—however many layers I extrapolate between myself and (Fill in The Blank)—the Ultimate (Fill in The Blank) only has

one possible name: God. It's worse than misguided. It's silly. Why would you need to build a Stairway to an Omnipresent Being? It's like Elmer Fudd staring down into the darkness of the rabbit hole and discussing the fine art of "twapping wascawwy wabbits" with Bugs—who's leaning on his shoulder chomping on a carrot.

FC: White always moves first to begin a game; is it important that Po is playing white and Cerebus black?

DS: It was a difficult—and increasingly more amusing—question to answer: who should be white, and who should be black? Obviously the white pieces metaphorically represent the light and the black pieces the void. In a hierarchical game of metaphorical chess, does the light play white pieces and the void black or does the checkerboard metaphor of alternating white and black sustain itself so that the void as player plays the white pieces and the light as player plays the black pieces? The yin and yang symbol where the swirl of black surrounds a white spot and the swirl of white surrounds a black spot. Was it even possible to determine which was which? Cerebus and Suenteus Po were both 30% black (gray). By making the spirit form of Po translucent, I effectively side-stepped the question. He appears at least 70% black (the opposite of Cerebus), but that's actually only the void showing through him. Technically it could be said that he's 70% white or even more, unless you eliminate the void that's showing through him, but that really becomes silly. How are you going to eliminate the void? The near-universal absence of everything which is the fabric of our reality, how are you going to move that aside? Where would you move it to that it won't already be when it gets there? Since I was still in building a "Stairway to Heaven" mode, these were not unimportant questions to me at the time. An inaccurately portrayed metaphor—a reality perceived inaccurately—could end up being a crucial missing rung. "Nahhhh (chomp chomp chomp) You was doin' great dere, Doc. Until you gave Po da white pieces. Den you became a real maroon. Den you became an ultra-maroon. Oh well (chomp chomp chomp). Bettah luck next time, bright boy."

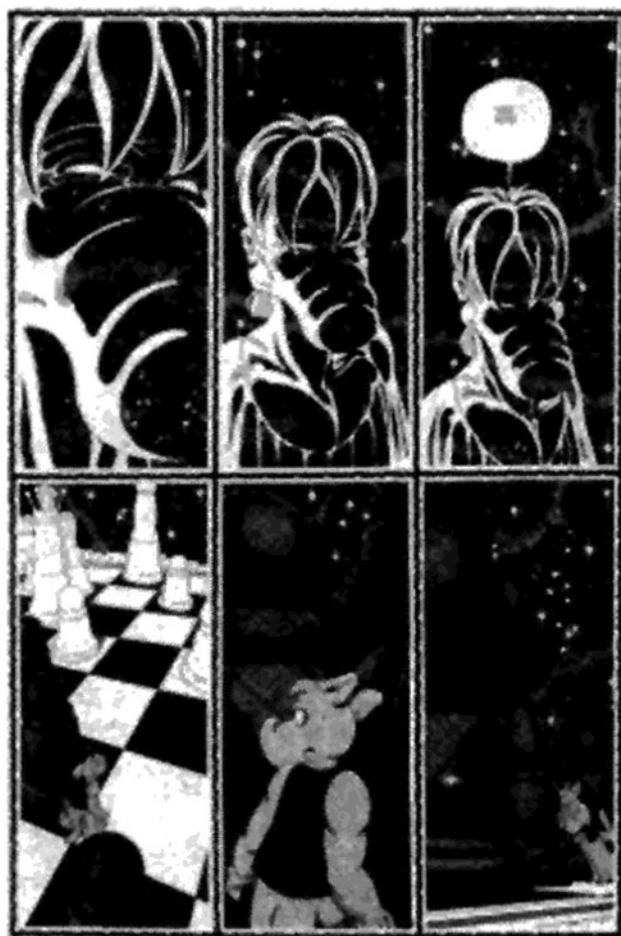
Suenteus Po and Cerebus play chess (from Cerebus *160).*

FC: Cerebus *186 stirred up major controversy surrounding you and the comic. You've re-thought the void/light aspect ("they're both false, and ridiculously so"), but another theme was about female/male relationships—emotion versus reason, merged permanence versus (what would later be called) eternal singularity and how that plays out in work, finances, arguments, etc. Do you think you were more or less on target with those observations?*

DS: I think I was more or less on target with those observations, yes. All of the problems that I was working through hooked up nicely and then converged once I found the hitherto missing-in-action capstone of my twenty-six-year-long pyramidal construction: the Torah, the Gospels, and the Koran, and that they provided me, by my inference, with Einstein's hitherto missing-in-action Unified Theory in 289/290. Of course the grand joke is that the pyramid itself was completely unnecessary and irrelevant. The capstone *is and always was* the only real part of the pyramid. I built this extended metaphorical argument over a quarter century to reach what had been right next to me all the way from the laying of the foundation.

D'OH!

FC: Do you have a standard answer for someone who's never read Cerebus *(or perhaps comics altogether) and is trying to decide which graphic novel to check out? Can someone pick up, say,* Jaka's Story *or* Melmoth *and read it by itself without being lost? Beyond which book would you discourage people from picking it up as their first exposure to the work?*

DS: I'm just in the middle of an experiment with Now & Then Books where we've given them ten copies of each of the trades to put out on display with an "unbagged" reading copy on top, marked as a reading copy—along with ten copies of three other "phone book" sized graphic novels, *From*

Hell, Blankets, and *Louis Riel.* It's this theory that I've had for years that, if you don't bug someone and just let them read as much of *Cerebus* as they want standing in the store, if it's their kind of thing, they'll get hooked. Over the course of four or five weeks, Dave's sold about two copies of each of the trades. *Riel* he sold five copies. So, that was my brilliant theory shot to hell. It doesn't surprise me. Virtually every experiment I tried in the direct market—national comic shop tours, national comic shop tours with publicists, national comic shop tours with publicists and being available for two days before the signing for in-town interviews, specialty cartoons tailored to each city, special to (your newspaper's name here), the Spirits stops,

Crowd scenes by Sim and Mort Drucker (at right from Animal House *parody in* MAD *207).*

Campaign '93, Campaign 2000: Four More Years—were complete or near-to-complete failures. The books sell at a nice steady pace if I just stay at home, and the books sell at a nice steady pace if I spend $20,000 and way too much time and energy on a twenty-six-city tour.

FC: Did Gerhard's background art influence the way you drew the characters?

DS: No, I can't say that Gerhard's backgrounds influenced the way I drew the characters. I always knew that the backgrounds would at least be really, really good, and usually a lot better than that, so I never had to think about the backgrounds, except for minor things like staying away from midtone gray cross-hatching on clothing and costume details. Since Gerhard used cross-hatching so extensively, it made his job easier if the characters I drew were either black or white or with cross-hatching that didn't dominate the figure. I probably put too much effort into the outside contours of the characters. Because Ger had a very "full" look to his work, it was often pointless to work at getting an accurately contoured curve on the edge of a sleeve since the area next to it would, most of the time, just be filled up with tightly woven cross-hatching or solid black. But it was difficult enough to know how finished my pages were with the characters hovering in the middle of an acre of white space without ignoring the outside contours into the bargain.

FC: Your caricatures near the end—say, from Form & Void *on—are especially amazing and seem to draw a fair amount of influence from the work of Mort Drucker. Were you studying his art at the time?*

DS: Yes, I went out and bought a bunch of *Mad* magazines and clipped out all of the Mort Drucker movie parodies and kept them in a pile next to the drawing board so they would be handy any time I needed to do a crowd scene. I have a magpie mind, creatively. Ten minutes of flipping through Drucker's pages, and my mind would picture everything in terms of his problem-solving. I ended up going too far back, inadvertently, and found an early effort where he and Wally Wood were basically inking the same way—a cartoony form of Hal Foster's literal realism but with Milt Caniff's brush line weight. At some point, evidently, Drucker just abandoned the field to Wood and started evolving the style he has now, which I found infinitely better and more interesting in terms of my own preferences.

I was down in Toronto visiting Chet and Joe and Seth a couple of years back, and Chet pulled out the splash page to the "Animal House" parody and said, "This was in the package you just sent me. Do you want it back?" *Desperately.* It was one of my favorite Drucker pieces. Wonderful crowd scene, amazingly accurate caricatures, beautifully composed, wonderful contoured pen lines. It impresses the hell out of me when I can get even a rough approximation of his style. I can't even imagine what a joy it must be to have invented that style pretty much out of thin air (and a little

magpie borrowing from the Arnold Roth and political cartoonists school).

FC: Are you ever tempted to go back and alter text or art in the trades as new printings go to press?

DS: Mm. No. It would just be impossible. Where would you start? Where would you finish? We were using a much, much finer line towards the end than we ever had previously. If you tried to touch up individual faces, you just wouldn't see the lines because the surrounding line densities we were using at that time would just overpower anything you could "dab in." You'd literally have to redraw another complete layer on top of the page that was already done. And if you go back to the really primitive stuff, the thinking was entirely different. You'd have to rethink the page on its own terms. It was fun redrawing some of the early panels in issue 300—doing the long pointed ears squared off on the end and the little tiny mouths on the side of Cerebus' head. It's certainly a venerable tradition for guys whose styles are thought to be out of fashion to do cover recreations. That would be great, I think. I can picture being this doddering old man, tracing off a light-boxed issue 11 cover that someone was going to pay me an ungodly amount of money to redraw. I might be a doddering old man by next year unless I can start getting some more sleep. That's about as close as I can picture getting to revisiting the old stuff, at least at this point.

FC: The last four trades have color covers. Was this to help sales (people love color) or for some other reason?

DS: That one functioned on a few different levels. On the Dave Sim level, I was signaling that I thought that I had accomplished what I had set out to accomplish by the end of *Rick's Story*—the "Stairway to Heaven" "Break on Through to the Other Side" (just to throw Jimmy Paige and Jim Morrison into bed together for a moment) which answered the question, "If Suenteus Po the two-dimensional black-and-white character could play an immaculate game of chess and so earn the right to enter into Dave Sim's world, what would he do in a three-dimensional technicolor world?" By that point I had what I considered to be "enough to go on" for the Torah Commentaries and a rough idea of what my version of the Big Bang was going to be like in 289/290, and I thought the Book of Rick had turned out to be a pretty good summing up of gender relations. So, whatever I intended to do there, I was pretty sure I had arrived in a new reality that was as different from my previous reality as a color photograph of a landscape is different from a black-and-white line drawing. As it turned out what I intended to do there was to acknowledge God's sovereignty, to pray five times a day, to give alms to the poor, and to fast in Ramadan, and the rest of the time would be my own. I had worked everything out to my own satisfaction, now I only had to get it all down on paper and, in a real sense, that would be it for my

"The quintessential female movie, *The Wizard of Oz*,...starts in black-and-white and then... switches to technicolor."

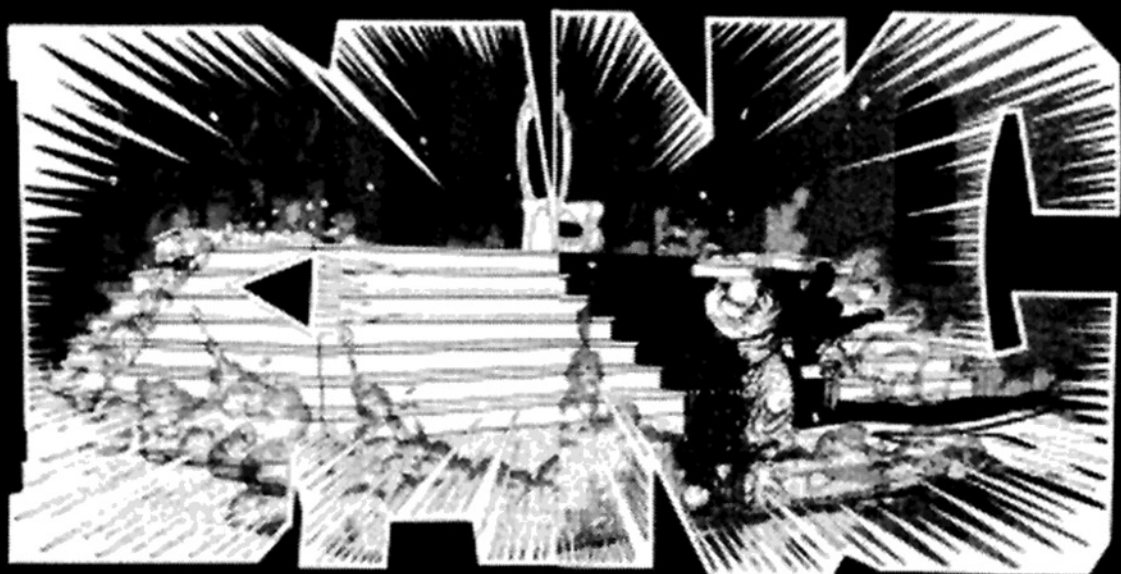
life. The next stop is death and after that, hopefully returning to God or *Going Home*. Awakening out of this life into actual reality which, I assume, will be as different from my present life as a color photograph of a landscape is different from a black-and-white line drawing.

In terms of the *Cerebus* level of reality, despite my best efforts, he just couldn't get past the "Jaka thing," and therefore he entered the female half of reality where a much-beloved analogous transformation takes place in the quintessential female movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, which starts in black-and-white and then, when Dorothy gets to Oz, switches to technicolor. This is a beloved transformation, I suspect, because it reflects female nature which sees the movement from schism to fragmentation as "a good thing," which is what color is. Light and darkness are white and black. A duality. "0" and "1." The fragmentation of light is color, a multiplicity. This was another part of the joke behind the title *Going Home*, indicating to the ladies and "ladies" in the audience that even at the point where the *Wizard of Oz* switches to color, when Dorothy arrives in Oz, she is also, in a real sense, *Going Home*. Or, as the Koran assures

"It was a given that Cerebus would end his days trapped in Oz."

us, we all came from God "and to Him we are returning." The fragmentation of light into color isn't permanent, the basic duality between light and darkness is still there, and only light is subject to entropy. It will, ultimately, dissipate.

It would've been nice to have done a series of black and white covers, a couple of color covers and then return to black-and-white for the ending. That was certainly a possibility before Cerebus and I had our chat. But after? No way. It was a given that Cerebus would end his days trapped in Oz—his inaccurate perception of and inability to escape his Jaka misapprehension having doomed himself to the fate he would suffer.

Following the Trail of Something That Fell

"Something fell."

The phrase reverberates through the Cerebus storyline. When it first appeared in issue 58, it seemed to be part of just another quirky Cerebus moment. Its second occurrence in issue 101 appeared merely to reflect back on the first time. But by the third appearance, in issue 184, it had established itself as its own ongoing mystery. Before the series ended, the phrase would appear eight times, often at dramatic moments in the storyline. But despite its repetition, and the importance of the events surrounding its occurrences, the meaning of the phrase itself remained oblique.

What fell?

And from where to where did this "what" fall?

The comic book series has concluded, so now is the time to assemble the pieces and see if a satisfactory answer will appear.

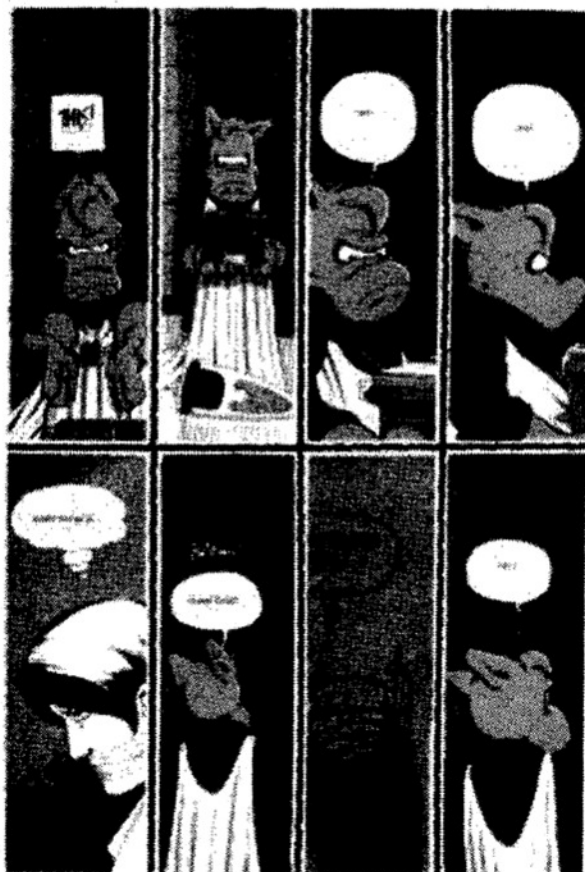
I. The Mystery Presented

Any solution to the "Something Fell" mystery first requires addressing at least two questions: (1) does each occurrence have a specific meaning that relates to the overall story, and (2) is it important *when* these occurrences happen, or is their placement in the story haphazard?

Only Dave Sim can answer these questions authoritatively as far as what his intentions were. We purposefully did not seek "answers" from him before working on this essay. While this allowed for the possibility that writing an essay examining the mystery would end up being a waste of time and looking ridiculous after-the-fact (what if Sim later said that the occurrences were meaningless and haphazard?), we placed our bets, based on the obvious thought and care that had been poured into *Cerebus*, that the repetition of the phrase is important.[1]

The second of our two questions is more interesting and complex than the first, and independent of it. Once we assume that the SF scenes are important and have some meaning in the context of the overall story, a follow-up naturally arises: are the occurrences precisely placed at particular

[1] Because the first occurrence is in issue 58, well after, according to Sim, he had the gist of the entire story worked out, this provides additional evidence that the phrase has meaning and relates to the overall story in some way. Eventually, Sim revealed only that the answer to the question, "What does 'Something Fell' mean?" is "intricate and ephemeral."

The first Something Fell scene (Church & State I).

Something Fell in Church & State II.

Something Fell in Women *(top) and* Reads *(bottom).*

moments in the story, or do they occur at times when Sim woke up that morning and thought, "I'm in the mood to do a 'Something Fell' scene today." For the purposes of this essay, we will assume that these scenes are placed precisely, not arbitrarily. We have no proof either way, though again the care with which the series has been constructed provides a reliable foundation for our assumption.

Now let us examine the scenes themselves:

(1) *Church & State*, volume 1, p. 147 (issue 58)

Cerebus, the prime minister of Iest, meets with Pope Harmony IV of the Eastern Church. (Popes Harmony II and III have been killed in quick succession.) The pope warns Cerebus that Weisshaupt is manipulating significant players so that he can gain power for himself, and the pope implores Cerebus to stop him. At that point Cerebus hears a sound behind him ("KRAK"), says "Something *fell!*" and sees a bishop with a crossbow. The official scribe proclaims the pope a Cirinist. Cerebus says, "What are they doing?" The bishop, acting under the authority of the Lion of Serrea (and in keeping with "the will of Tarim"), assassinates Harmony IV. Cerebus is shocked at this unexpected turn of events.

(2) *Church & State,* volume II, p. 1007 (issue 101)

Astoria is on trial, and Pope Cerebus is the judge. The events play out as an exact re-enactment of Suenteus Po's trial in which he was sentenced to death by being burned at the stake. Astoria is pontiff of the western church (having assassinated the Lion of Serrea); by killing her, Cerebus would assume the position and unite the eastern and western churches. As Cirin prepares to invade Iest with all of her forces, Cerebus delays Astoria's sentence (to the dismay of Bishop Powers) and suddenly finds a box left by Weisshaupt with a gold sphere and a note inside that reads, "Good luck." As this is happening, Cerebus hears a "Bang!" and says, "Something fell" (as Astoria thinks, "Something's different"). Scenes flash back to the death of Pope Harmony IV. Cerebus drops the box (with a "bang"), grabs the sphere, and, to Astoria's horror, flees, becoming the subject in the Ascension.

(3) *Women*, p. 84 (issue 166)

The Cirinists have taken control of Iest. A sleepwalking Cerebus stands on a rooftop and raises his sword, confusing Cirin and her troops. Suddenly the mountain begins to grow, until the top breaks off and falls onto the city (with a "crak," a "thak," and a "thoom"), damaging, among other buildings, the Regency Hotel. Cirin (apparently) asks, "Something Fell! What's happening?"

(4) *Reads*, p. 187 (issue 184)

Cerebus fights Cirin in the throne room. Immediately after Victor Davis (in the text section) says, "Bang, bang, bang," Cerebus thinks, "Something Fell." Next, a "big bang" fills a double-page spread. Two more (plus a single-pager) follow, as the throne room crumbles away, leaving only the throne itself and steps leading up to it (which soon

Something Fell in Guys.

Something Fell in Rick's Story.

also crumble).

(5) *Guys,* p. 67 (issue 203)

After returning to Earth (courtesy of Dave) at the end of *Minds,* Cerebus spends much of his time in a drunken stupor at a small tavern. At one point, having fallen behind the bar, he tries to pull himself up after lying on the floor for a while. But he fails and falls back to the floor with a "thump." Harrison Starkey hears this "thump" and says, "Woot wooz that?! Soomthen fell!" Cerebus thinks, "Please Dave. Please. Cerebus just wants to die."

Something Fell in Rick's Story.

Something Fell in Going Home.

(6) *Rick's Story*, p. 23 (issue 220)

Rick visits Cerebus's tavern and becomes very, very drunk. After ridiculing Cerebus as a "bartender-pope" and reciting a mangled version of the twenty-third Psalm, Rick's now-empty glass falls, and he says, "Something fell." An angry Cerebus recoils in pain.

(7) *Rick's Story*, p. 118 (issue 225)

Rick has recently begun writing his book; Cerebus is convinced Rick is crazy and wonders whether he can be left on his own. As Cerebus mulls this over, he hears a "bang" and thinks, "Something fell." He looks behind him and sees what appears to be Cirin. He's then hit from behind ("crak"), turns to see who or what hit him (it's never shown), and when he turns back, Cirin is gone, and Cerebus is confused.

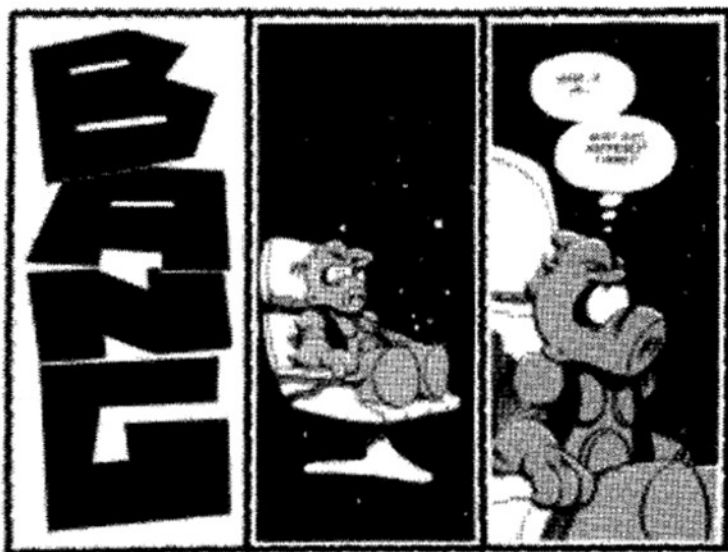
(8) *Going Home*, p. 103 (issue 236)

Cerebus and Jaka have re-united. As Jaka returns from a ceremony honoring her, Cerebus talks to a man, Thomas, in a bar. Thomas quotes "Prophet Ricke," which surprises Cerebus. Thomas hears a "smash" and says, "Something fell." The bartender throws Thomas out for "bothering my customers." There's a "bang!" as Cerebus chases after Thomas.

II. Patterns and Repetitions

In reviewing all of the "Something Fell" scenes back-to-back, certain similarities immediately become obvious. Except for the first *Rick's Story* occurrence,[2] all are preceded by a sound—usually one that startles the speaker of the dialogue. The sound itself varies and is only sometimes identified. (The most common one, "bang," is used in four of the eight instances, but the source of that sound is least often identified and as such remains the most mysterious.)

Second, the sound not only startles the speaker but often arouses curiosity as to its origin, and the uncertainty of the origin creates a general confusion, in the SF speaker at least. In the first occurrence, Cerebus asks Pope Harmony IV about the scribe and suddenly-appearing bishop assassin: "What are they doing?" In the second, Cerebus sees the box left by Weisshaupt and asks, "What's This? This box." In *Women*, after the Black Tower falls, Cirin asks, "What's happening?" as her army is in panicky disarray. Cerebus and Cirin are clearly confused as the throne room crumbles away in *Reads*. In *Guys*, Harrison asks, "What was that?" And in *Rick's Story* (p. 118), Cerebus wonders about Cirin's sudden appearance and disappearance and says, "What. Is going on."

Finally, the incidents often have a direct reference to death. In *Church & State* volume 1, Cerebus hears the sound and says "something fell" immediately prior to Harmony's assassination. In volume 2, Cerebus is expected to sentence Astoria to death—at least that is what Bishop Powers is imploring Cerebus to do and what Astoria herself expects. In *Women*, the tower falls and, though reports vary, kills at least a few, and more likely many, Iestians. In *Reads*, Cerebus and Cirin are in a fight to the death. In *Guys*, a drunken Cerebus falls to the floor and "just wants to die." In *Going Home*, a woman who is talking with Jaka (while Cerebus talks with Thomas) is found dead the next morning.

A "bang" and confusion in Minds.

Can we conclude anything just from these three similarities? The *Reads* chapter contains a fascinating clue. Four pages before the "Something Fell" moment, Sim connects the sound effect (a big "bang") that is about to follow with a specific reference to death: "Kennedy's head wound was the Big Bang of the last half of the twentieth century" (p. 183). Just as the first World War helped to bring about the death of utopian ideals about the nature of man, Kennedy's assassination (and the Watergate scandal that followed) spurred a cynicism about American politics by Americans themselves. (The longstanding adherence to individualism and isolationism suggested that Americans were always suspicious of *foreign* entanglements, but by the sixties disillusionment about domestic politics had arisen among anti-war liberals and a decade later, for different reasons, reached the conservatives.) The assassination of Kennedy induced a sense of general confusion—

[2] A panel depicts Rick's falling glass shattering on the floor, but there is no accompanying sound effect.

how could *this* happen *here* in the United States, and to *him* of all people—that was a cultural "Big Bang."

But how to convey all of this—the ability of a dramatic event to shift the world while alluding to these themes—succinctly in a comic book? By hinting at it in the prose, and then, five pages later (pp. 188-189), to draw a huge, double-page "bang" —a BIG BANG—that cannot be missed by either the characters or the readers. Sim is melding the real world and the fictional world and, interestingly, using "sound" as a junction point. "Sound" is in quotes here because this is one of the senses that cannot be reproduced accurately on the page—one can imagine a "bang" when one sees the word, but the sound itself is not heard—and this is the very process Sim uses to merge the worlds, attempting the impossible (which is not lost on the reader), but succeeding as well as could be expected. The "real world" is crashing into the fictional world (or they are crashing into each other), and to the degree possible Sim is showing how elements only possible in one area are intruding into the other. And lest one think this is accidental, Sim immediately follows his section about Kennedy and the Big Bang with a paragraph about schizophrenia and "the inability to differentiate between reality and fantasy."[3]

In the course of seven pages in *Reads* (pp. 183-189), then, everything comes together: sounds, confusion, death, the real world, and the fictional world, and in the middle of it all (literally: on page 187), Cerebus is thinking, "Something Fell."

There are two elements about the Cerebus storyline as a whole that we should note. One, repetition and historical cycles are dominant themes in the work, so the recurring "Something Fell" motif fits into place among other recurring motifs of ascension, accumulation and loss and re-accumulation of power, literary forms (biography, autobiography, fiction, non-fiction, etc.), and many others. As the story moves forward, it also reflects back on earlier themes and events, though in different ways. Sim has compared the storyline to a spiral, whereby certain "points" are passed more than once, but on higher and higher levels.[4]

Two, the "Something Fell" motif is implicitly important not only because it is one of the recurring elements in the storyline, but because it generally comes at a critical moment in Cerebus's life. The death of Pope Harmony IV paves the way for Weisshaupt to manipulate Cerebus to become pope. The second occurrence reinforces Weisshaupt's influence but also inspires Cerebus to break the historical cycle, not sentence Astoria to death, and attempt the Ascension himself. The third occurrence coincides with a cataclysmic event in the life of Iest. The *Reads* moment may be the most interesting (and complex), as the division

Events in Cerebus *have an "echoing" effect reminiscent of some recent films (such as* Eyes Wide Shut, *above, with Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise), in which mirrors are used to convey the idea that later scenes "reflect back" (in a reversed or distorted way) on earlier scenes.*

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[3]Note another use of the word "bang" that fills the panel (albeit a much smaller panel that those described above) amidst a merging of reality and fantasy: during the Cerebus/Dave discussion in *Minds* (p. 180), Cerebus requests a drink, and he consumes so much that he balloons to gigantic proportions. Suddenly, with a "bang," he returns to normal, asks "what just happened there?" (another connection between that sound and confusion), and is told by Dave what just happened to him (another intrusion of Dave into the comic, along with a clever presentation of how authors manipulate stories).

[4]It is beyond the scope of this essay, but one might compare the "echoing" effects in the Cerebus storyline (in *C&SII*, page 966, for instance, Astoria tells Cerebus during her trial, "You and I—*we*'re the echoes") with Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1990), or perhaps David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1995) or *Mulholland Drive* (2002). In each of these, the first part of the film sets up certain scenarios that are then "echoed" in the later sections of the film. But the echoes, the reflections, are imperfect, as themes are not only often "reversed," but distorted as well. Not surprisingly, all three films contain important scenes featuring the central characters staring at themselves in mirrors.

between Sim's real world and fictional world dissolves significantly within the comic. In *Rick's Story* (p. 118), the *Book of Ricke* text that runs alongside the SF scene recounts Rick's understanding (finally) of the woman/angel/devil/viper/scorpion distinction. Even the *Going Home* passage—perhaps seemingly insignificant at first glance—foreshadows Rick's (and his book's) growing reputation.[5]

It would not be an unreasonable leap, then, to suggest that if the "Something Fell" moments come at important times in the story, that they also point to an ultimate "Something Fell." Speculation has run high since the publication of *Cerebus* 300 that the "something" is actually some*one*—namely, Cerebus himself. Indeed, he dies from a broken neck sustained when he falls off a stool trying to get down from his bed.

Surely it's not coincidental that Cerebus's fall is preceded by a sound, "thunk thunk"—the same sound the assassin's arrow made as it struck Harmony IV and killed him. (In both instances, another sound, "tung," precedes the "thunk." It was the sound of the arrow's being fired from the crossbow, and also the sound of Cerebus's pulled hamstring that caused him to lose his balance on the stool.)

Perhaps the clearest foreshadowing of Cerebus's death by a fall occurred in *Rick's Story* (p. 205): Cerebus is having a conversation with himself and thinks, "Cerebus will just stand around all

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[5]In general, however, post-issue 200 occurrences of "Something Fell" surround events that are insignificant compared to the pre-200 occurrences, which come at critical points leading to Cerebus's rise to power or other cataclysmic events (the death of Pope Harmony IV, the Final Ascension, the fall of the Black Tower, the battle between Cerebus and Cirin). Nothing of similar dramatic import happens during the SF scenes of the final hundred issues (though, thematically, the *Rick's Story* scene noted above comes close).

(From top left) Cerebus ponders death, falls one last time, almost falls, and jumps.

day...until Cerebus grows old, falls over and dies."

The final fall, that of Cerebus himself, not only includes a literal fall that results in his death, but probably a spiritual "fall" as well. Cerebus is drawn toward "the light" but soon realizes that he does not see Rick. Suddenly suspicious of this place of light, Cerebus backs away and cries for God's help: "The light has got Cerebus!" But assistance does not come, and Cerebus is whisked away, screaming, into this brightness.

Is this final fall yet another example of the aforementioned cycles that occur in the storyline? Absolutely. In the double issue 112/113, titled "Square One," Cerebus has returned from the moon at the end of *Church & State* and finds everyone at the Regency gone and his gold stolen. Despondent, and convinced that he will "die alone, unmourned and unloved," he decides to end his life by leaping off a demolished walkway on the side of a mountain. He tosses aside his sword and medallions (with a "clang") and leans over the edge when loud thunder ("kraka thakka boom") startles him out of his daze, and he manages to grab hold of the ledge after he had essentially begun his fall. After falling asleep (and dreaming about once again almost falling), he begins the next day prepared to begin life anew.

Cerebus's second "fall" is at the end of *Minds*. As with "Square One," Cerebus is convinced his life is over and that he will die alone, unmourned, and unloved. Isolated on Pluto, Cerebus decides he wants to return to Estarcion. All he has to do is "jump off the rock [he's] standing on." He'll "drift down through the 'whiteness' for a while" until he ends up at his requested tavern. After some procrastination, Cerebus jumps and begins falling (accompanied by a "crunch" sound effect caused by Dave sitting at his drawing table eating a carrot and watching the events). As with "Square One," the sequence creates an "ending" of sorts,[6] and in some ways the story restarts in the following issue.

Does the final fall in issue 300 do the same thing? Note that, as in the sequence that closes *Minds*, Cerebus finds himself enveloped in "whiteness." *Cerebus* 201-300 covers the character's emergence from the *Minds* "fall," and issue 300 presents an afterlife scenario that suggests that, although Cerebus is dead, in some way he lives on. Once again, Cerebus's fall is a doorway leading to a new beginning.

[6]For years we considered the possibility that Sim was using an "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" structure here, in which the Cerebus story essentially ends in issue 200 (suggested—perhaps jokingly—on page 185 of *Reads*), but continues on only in his mind (perhaps in just a few seconds during his leap off the rock). Note that in our interview with Gerhard, he also suggests that the story ends in issue 200: "After *Minds,...the* story was over."

III. Something Fell, and Something Else Didn't Fall

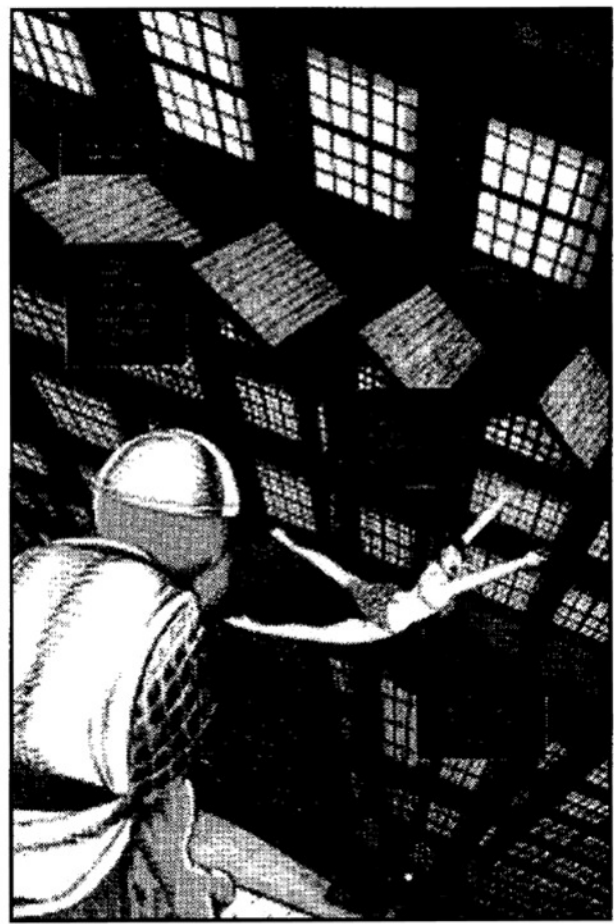
There is a fascinating aspect to the "something fell" scene in *Cerebus* 300[7]: Sim is careful to show us that, while Cerebus fell, the stool that he tumbled from *didn't* fall. It tipped precariously but returned to its upright position (with a "thunk thunk"). So if all of the references to "Something Fell" ultimately point to this scene, the reader should probably give thought to anything significantly highlighted. Does the "unfallen" stool mean anything (besides creating the sounds, which could have been accomplished with a fallen stool if Sim had wished)?

The entire scene could be part of what might be an entire sub-section of "Something Fell" scenes, and that would be scenes in which something fell (or didn't fall) but in which the noted dialogue is not spoken by any of the characters. Assigning scenes to this sub-group is subjective and possibly arbitrary. When Cerebus and Bear play Five-Bar Gate (*Guys*, pp. 179-215), should the falling ball (and "tung" sounds) count? How about the various characters who get thrown off of high places (Cerebus punting the old man from atop the Regency in *Church & State II*, p. 335; the Thrunk tossing Cerebus from the Upper City in *C&SI*, pp. 590-592; the Thrunk booting Spider-Roach and Elrod off of the mountain in *C&S II*, p. 736)? The falling right ear of the stone aardvark statue beneath the Red Marches (*Flight*, p. 87)? Cerebus's falling sword during his fight with Cirin (*Reads*, p. 138)?[8]

[7]The phrase itself, however, does not appear here.
[8]The only section of the story that uses "fall" in the title, the final chapter of *Going Home* ("Fall and the River"), not only does not contain any literal "Something Fell" moments, but no falling scenes, period, with or without the noted dialogue. Perhaps there is a metaphorical "fall" at work in this section that, for the moment, eludes us, though it's surely not coincidental that the river is called the Feld River (i.e. Felled River). However, the Feld River (and the Feldwôr States) not only first appeared in a map back in *Cerebus* 3 (significantly before Sim had the long-term story worked out, and *very* long before the first "Something Fell" occurrence), but, according to Sim's comment in *Cerebus Bi-Weekly* 3, was named not by him but by Michael Loubert, who designed the map.

Nevertheless, we'll note two such scenes that, like the issue 300 sequence, do not contain the "Something Fell" phrase but nevertheless seem more than incidental. When Cerebus first meets Bran Mak Muffin and the Picts, he finds them worshipping a giant clay aardvark idol. Determined not to be confused with any Pict redeemer, Cerebus destroys the statue, and the flimsy material falls to the ground in a pile around him. In *Minds,* Cerebus finally learns that this entire incident epitomizes his "fractured destiny" (p. 198). Almost from the beginning, it turns out, Cerebus was a "fallen" individual who would never fulfill the prophesies that the Picts had believed in.

The second scene occurs in *Church & State II.* Astoria is Cerebus's prisoner, and after an interrogation he rapes (or "rapes") her. Cerebus falls asleep and has a dream. Near the end, Astoria is dressed as Red Sophia. She's trying to explain something to Cerebus, but he refuses to listen. He pushes her off a building, but instead of a "something fell" blurb, it reads, "Something wrong. She's hardly falling at all—the wind or something [is] holding her up" (p. 894-895). She's trying to tell Cerebus about "three" somethings—presumably the existence of three aardvarks in Estarcion (which Cerebus learned about in *C&SI*).

Is the scene a "Something Fell" scene or a "something *didn't* fall" scene? It exists somewhere oddly inbetween, perhaps because it takes place in a dream.[9] Astoria/Red Sophia is falling, but mo-

Astoria/Red Sophia "hardly falls at all."

mentarily being "held up" by some undetermined force. However, the scene does suggest the three common features of "Something Fell" scenes: confusion (Cerebus can't make out what she is saying), death (the next page shows Cerebus standing in the line of fire of a huge cannon), and sound (a small blurb that simply says, "boom").

If the dream sequence somewhat treads the line between falling and not falling, there is an-

Cerebus loses his balance in Church & State II.

[9]Another dream-like sequence (it's not literally a dream) contains a near-fall that is similar to the "Square One" scene noted above. In *Church & State II* (p. 811), Cerebus is talking to Tarim while standing on a floating platform. He stomps away and suddenly finds himself at the end of the platform. He almost falls off but catches the ledge on the way down and pulls himself back up. *Going Home* features yet another dream sequence (pp. 149-161) that begins immediately after Cerebus and Jaka pass Montgomery *Falls.* In Cerebus's dream, "Alan Moore" recounts the story of a *fallen* bride and the process by which a gentleman (or some gentlemen) will raise her up. The scene even contains a dramatic sound heard only by Cerebus ("smash") and an image of death (a skeletal Red Sophia). However, because this is not, strictly speaking, a "Something Fell" scene, and because its complexity demands greater examination than is possible—or pertinent—here, we will return to it in a future issue.

other scene—one that mystified us for years—that might make more sense when put in the context of something-fell-versus-something-didn't-fall. At the end of *Going Home*, Jaka and Cerebus have completed their voyage down river and are about to exit the boat as it docks at Dead Salt Locks. Cirinist soldiers are amassed on the shore, presumably to arrest him (as the Cirinists would tell it, they would "lead him away"—see p. 304). Their plan is to delay Jaka so that she will not be able to accompany a disembarking Cerebus, leaving him isolated and vulnerable. But Jaka discerns their plan, quickly catches up to Cerebus, rushes past him, and walks down the platform first. The army backs up, and Jaka and Cerebus walk through the soldiers unharmed. (Exactly *why*, we'll confess we're not sure, and Cerebus himself is confused, asking Jaka, "Whad wuz dadt all aboud?" But she does not answer his question.)

Jaka doesn't fall in Going Home.

The oddest moment of this odd scene is Jaka's rush past Cerebus. In her haste, she loses her balance and almost falls—almost, *but not quite.* Something has shifted from the expected results, as with the *C&SII* "Something Fell" scene, but here nothing falls. The sound Jaka's feet make approximate the first *(C&SI)* and last *(Cerebus 300)* something fell sounds, "tung" and "thunk," but does not reproduce them exactly, here being simply "tunk." It's an audio clue that this is not the usual foreshadowing of Cerebus's death, because here something *doesn't* fall, i.e. Jaka. She lives, and so does Cerebus, just like the stool in issue 300 that tips but doesn't fall: unlike Cerebus, it continues to "live." In the world of *Cerebus*, falling is tied to death; *not* falling is associated with life.

IV. Something Fell, and Something Rose

Some things fall, some things don't fall, and some things rise. Just as falling is a recurring motif, it's most precise opposite is rising, and sure enough ascension is also represented more than once. The first ascension is, ironically, called the Final Ascension, and Cerebus is the first one to accomplish the feat. Every few hundred years, the Black Tower would grow until it became unstable and fell over, killing the people below. Weisshaput and Cirin, simultaneously, figured out that someone—*anyone*—standing on top of the tower as it grew would ascend to heaven and then return as redeemer. But Cerebus—with Weisshaupt's aid—was the first to succeed.

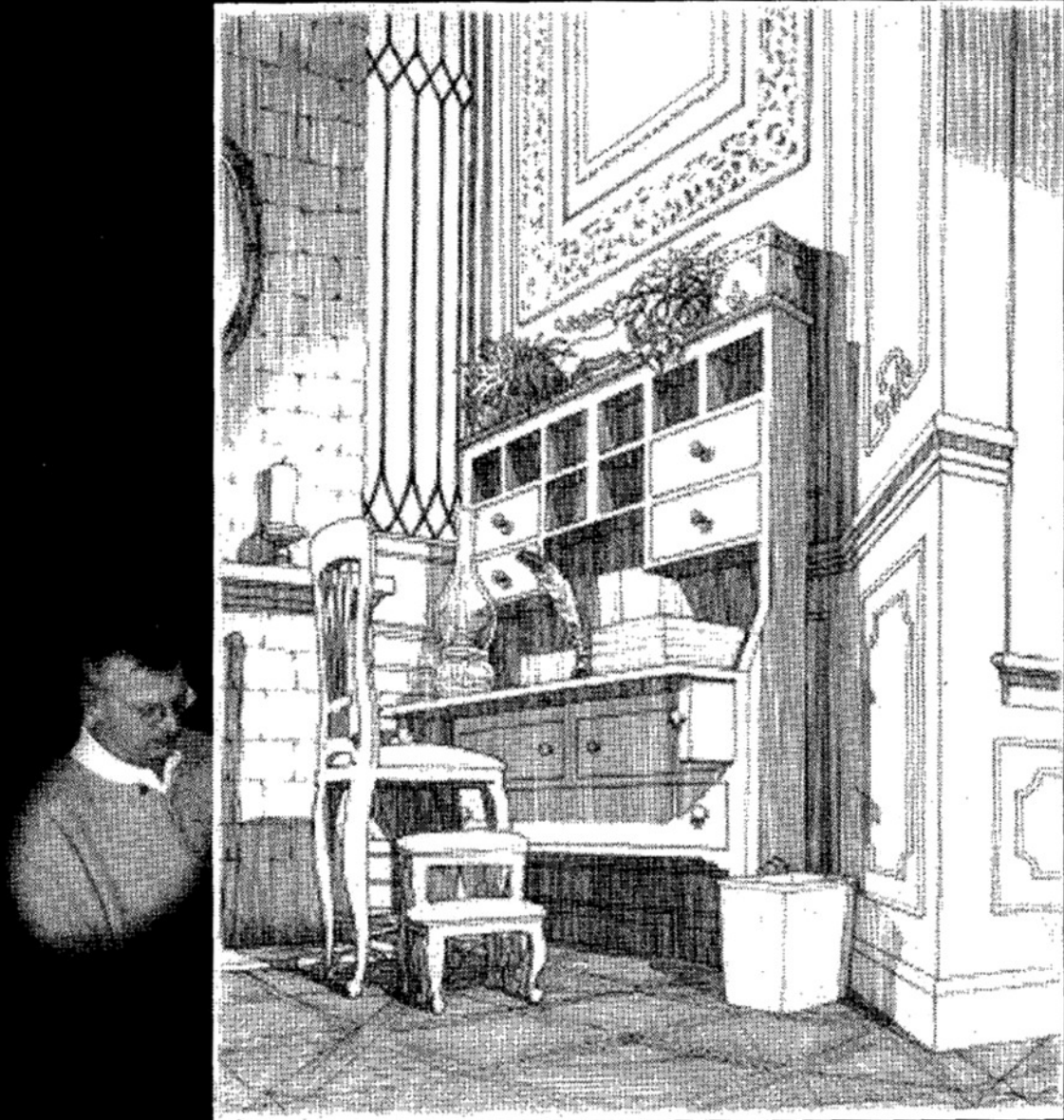
The "reward" didn't turn out as expected, however: Cerebus ended up not in heaven talking to Tarim, but on the moon talking to the Judge, though he does proceed to reveal to Cerebus various cosmic truths, such as how the universe was created, how the solar system will be destroyed, and that Cerebus will live only a few more years, die alone, unmourned, and unloved, and in the meantime experience much (deserved) suffering.

The second "ascension" is not called such but serves a similar function and is another example of the "echoing" effect of repeated themes. In *Flight*, Cerebus mysteriously disappears[10] from Iest as he tries to lead an uprising against the Cirinists. Cerebus floats through whiteness (as will be seen at the close of *Minds*), then reaches the black "seventh sphere." Eventually Cerebus reaches the eighth sphere, where he plays a chess game with Suenteus Po and in the process learns still more about the nature of reality (and perhaps the unreliability of the Judge).

Can the scene in issue 300 be considered the series' true "final ascension"? After Cerebus's death, his spirit stands beside his body, then is bathed in a white light. He leaps up, flying or float-

(see "Something Fell" on page 43)

[10]And lest there be any confusion, Normalroach explicitly says that Cerebus doesn't disappear, he "ascends" (p. 75).

Staying in the background

The Gerhard interview

Gerhard provided the background art for almost 250 issues of Cerebus, *and that seems appropriate for the man who seems to stay in the background, literally. While Dave Sim created Cerebus, was the driving force behind the story, and was the public face of Aardvark-Vanaheim, Gerhard remained relatively hidden.*

But the quality of his art couldn't hide. As the comic book series progressed, Gerhard's backgrounds became more elaborate and increasingly extraordinary. By the time of Mothers & Daughters, *the art was among the best of contemporary comic art (at least), and with* Latter Days, *the art stands as some of the best in the history of comics. As Sim's figure drawing continued to improve, Gerhard matched him line-for-line to create pages that are breathtaking in their composition, mood, texture, lighting, storytelling, and emotional power.*

But the real challenge is trying to get an interview with Gerhard, who (by our count) has done only two magazine interviews to date. Even if we're off a tad, it's surely fewer than five. He compares doing an interview to going to the dentist to have a tooth pulled. Nevertheless, with some reluctance, agreed to answer our questions via e-mail in June. Not surprisingly, his answers were insightful and entertaining, and fans of his art will no doubt enjoy reading his views. Our thanks to Gerhard!

FC: In an interview a few years ago, you said that what you wanted most after the completion of Cerebus *was sleep, sleep, and more sleep. Have you been getting all you wanted?*
GER: I slept a lot for the first couple of weeks after finishing the book. Major Down Time. Now, the trick is to be able to take a nap as required without feeling guilty about it. I figure I'll just keep practicing until I get it right.
FC: In the notes for the Latter Days *trade, Dave talks about how you almost left the series with twelve issues to go. How serious were you in intending to leave, and how much work was it to get you to stick it out for another year?*
GER: I was at the end of my rope. I was very serious in my intent to leave. I didn't care what the consequences were going to be. I wanted out. My health, both mental and physical, was deteriorating. My stomach hurt all the time but became excruciating while I was laboring on a page, especially during inking. Inking is always the stage where I feel that I'm completely ruining the page, which is why it drove me nuts when I got nominated for best inker awards.

I was also very disconnected from the book, from the story. And the Three Stooges—well, I just never "got" the Three Stooges. As soon as I saw the pages with Cerebus bound and gagged in the sanctuary, I thought, "Oh, no." I mean, in *Guys* and *Rick's Story,* he was stuck in that bar for years, but now he's actually tied down to one spot. "Shoot me now!" Then, doing that two-page spread of the sanctuary, all I could think of while I was working on it was, "I'm going to have to draw this from fifty-seven different angles for months, I just know it!" The idea was to use that two-page spread as a "master" shot and photocopy sections of it for use behind the characters, but it never works out that way. I tried using photocopies on previous pages. It's terribly tedious. I have to cut the photocopy from around the word balloons and sound effects, glue the copy to the page, and then touch up with a pen around the word balloons and sound effects where the photocopy doesn't meet the edge of the word balloons and sound effects, and then when the issue comes in from the printer, the photocopy has broken up or filled in, and it looks like crap. So the only alternative is to draw the same stupid background over and over twenty times. And that's just for this issue. I don't know how long he's going to be tied up, I don't know where the story is going, I don't know if I can do this anymore.

Then of course a page comes along, like the page where Rabbi is flying above the earth, or where Cerebus is on the reviewing stand in front of the farmhouse, or the Sporemobile, or the exterior of the Community Centre, where I think, "Hey, I can do this." And then I come hard up against the page with the little Spore marching over the landscape, and I'm stumped. Can't do it. Dave did the page this way because he thought I'd like the aerial shot. Can't picture it, can't do it, and my stomach starts to hurt now just thinking about it.

So anyway, this goes on 'till the long pan shot at the end of *Latter Days.* I feel sick. I'm tired. I have trouble eating. I have trouble sleeping. It's just not worth it. I should have left the book after *Minds,* when the story was over. I bring in the rest of the pages to Dave and tell him I can't do this anymore. He talks me out of it (again). The thing is, there are only nine pages to go, and then *Latter Days* is done. We decide that I will do as much work on the page as I can, until I just can't stand it anymore, and Dave will finish it up. Like I said, it's mostly the inking that drives me nuts. So I did my usual pencilling, paste on photocopies, outline stuff, and fill in solid blacks. Then I would ink in

"Inking is always the stage where I feel that I'm completely ruining the page."

details and shading as much as I could and hand 'em over to Dave. He added some detail to certain areas and sometimes another level of cross-hatching to increase contrast, and I managed to limp through to the end.

After that I took some time off, started laying out the room for *The Last Day* and working out the 360 degree shot for the covers while Dave worked on 289-290. Then Dave came up with the "Done By Christmas" incentive. I heard angels singing. I saw the light. And the light *was* the end of the tunnel. And I saw that that was very good.

FC: The artwork from Latter Days was the best of the run. Were you able to keep up the pace of the earlier work, or were you spending longer on each page? And what was your daily (or weekly) pace?

GER: Well, thank you for thinking that this was the best of the run. It seemed like the only feedback I got at the time was along the lines of, "Hey Ger, what are you doing with all your spare time now that the book is nothing but pages and pages of tiny type?"

From a 3D Home Architect printout, Gerhard works out camera angles for the barge in "Fall and the River."

Of course because of all that tiny type, I was able to spend more time on each drawing. I always preferred doing a single large illustration to doing a series of small drawings. I would always shoot for two pages a day and would be satisfied with a page and a half and usually end up with a page a day.

At this time Dave was a whole issue ahead of me, which gave me the opportunity to see which pages were going to need the most work, and I could budget my time accordingly.

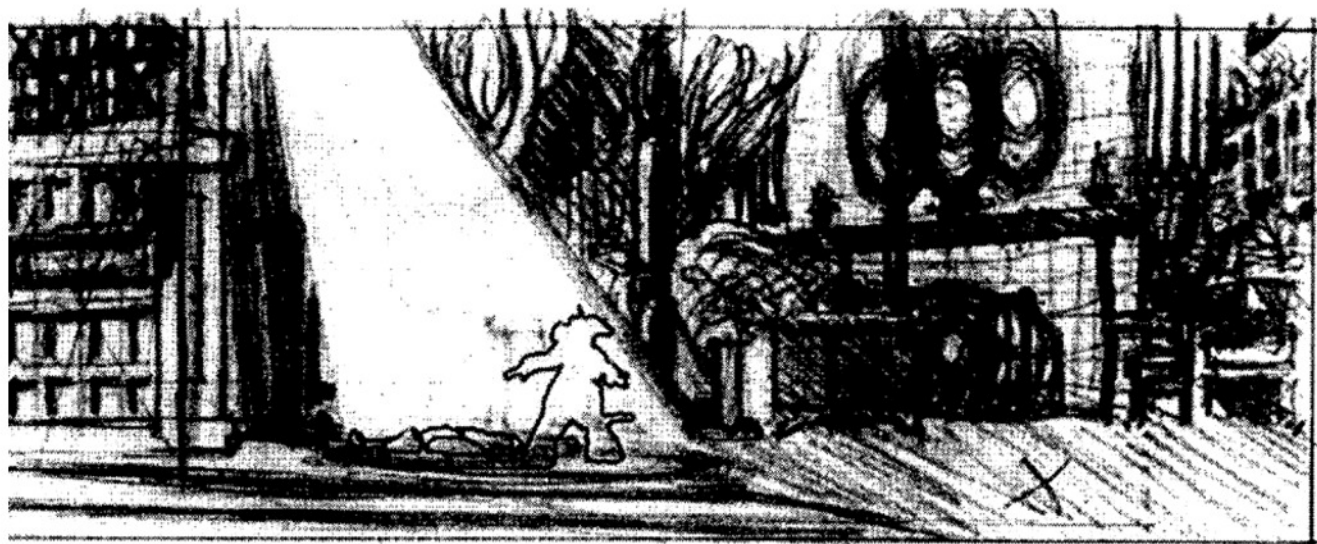
FC: A lot of this latter work relied heavily on images from film and other assorted references. Did this make the backgrounds easier to do than having to create everything from scratch?

GER: Yes and no. It's a lot of work figuring out perspectives and lighting and composition, which are all taken care of when I'm just basically copying a photo. But I would take a lot of extra time and care in trying to make it the best copy of that photo that I could. I was reasonably happy with the way they turned out. I like working from photo reference instead of relying on my fickle imagination.

FC: You've talked before about building miniature models of certain locations to make it easier to determine the angles of the backgrounds. Did you do that Sanctuary of the Three Wise Fellows, or was that all created using a computer architecture program?

GER: I didn't make a physical model of the sanctuary; it wasn't going to be time-effective. I had a floor plan. It's basically the bar from *Guys*, and I did have it sent up on my 3D Home Architect program. But most of the shots were straight on. The master shot from the two page spread, I did use that as my guide; I just didn't use photocopies. I would enlarge the section I needed to the right proportion on the photocopier and then redraw the background.

FC: When did you start using computer programs to assist you with the design of the locations?

GER: I started using the computer for the bar in *Guys* but was having trouble getting what I saw on the screen printed out to a usable image on paper.

Pencils on tracing paper from Cerebus *300.*

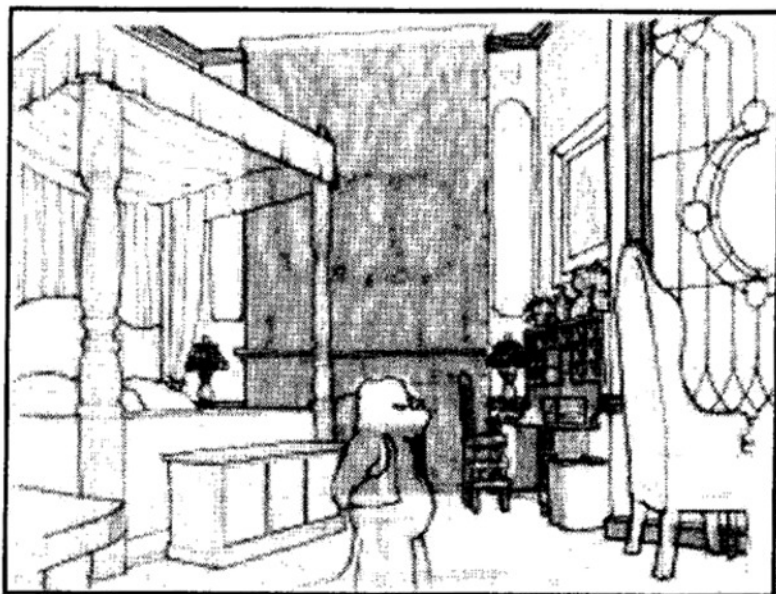
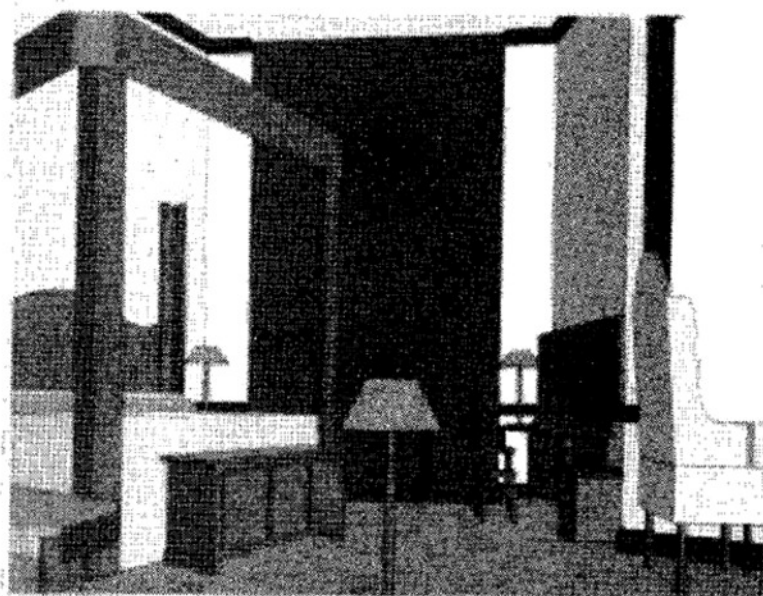
I did most of the work figuring out camera angles on a floor plan.

I finally got a system worked out for "Fall and the River" in *Going Home*. I had a physical model of the barge as well as a computer model. For *The Last Day*, I used the computer extensively for the interior shots. I would find the right camera position with the computer, flip the image horizontally so it was a mirror image, resize the image so that the little lamp that I used to represent Cerebus was the same height as the Cerebus on the page, print it out, lay tracing paper on top, trace the outlines of the backgrounds and add details and a light source, flip the tracing paper over onto the page so that it's now the right way around and transfer the pencil from the back of the tracing paper onto the page. Tighten the pencils and ink it. Repeat as necessary.

FC: The room of Last Day *has a very peculiar design, with lots of odd angles. What was the reason for that?*

GER: Most of the rooms I designed tended to be very regular, rectangular shaped rooms. For *The Last Day,* Dave gave his criteria for the room beforehand. We need a writing desk here, bed here, chair by a window here, stone wall somewhere for Cerebus to hide the manuscript, door over there. So I started with all of those elements, put them in relation to each other, and then put the walls around them. It did make for a very unusual room, but some rooms, especially in older buildings, can be quite convoluted. And I liked it. And I could do all the brain-twisting angles and perspectives on the computer without driving myself totally bugf---.

FC: It seems like the art in issue 298, especially beginning with the exterior shots starting on pages 3-7, changes from earlier issues. Whereas the play of light upon the architecture generally had a lifelike, organic quality, here it's cold and lifeless. (The interiors don't seem to undergo a similar change.) Was this intentional?

GER: It's interesting that you see that much of a difference. Those pages, what we refer to as the "Citizen Kane crane shot," were worked out by Dave. I mean, not just thumbnail sketches, but panel by panel, how far to pull back, what we see in the panel, lighting, shading, the whole nine yards, in ink (although most of it was marker, I think). He did them about half the size of a finished page; otherwise we could have almost used his layouts as finished pages, they were that detailed. So when it came time for me to do those pages, I wasn't going to start from square one and do it differently. I just basically redid what he had already worked out. So yes, it was intentional, but it wasn't anticipated. Not by me, anyway.

Building a Cerebus scene (the middle image is marker on tracing paper over a computer printout).

FC: In your Feature Magazine *interview a few years ago, you said that you "struggle your way through [almost every page] and then [are] disappointed with the final result." Did this immediate sense of disappointment ever leave?*

GER: Nope. I am almost always left with the sense that I could have done that better.

FC: What's your impression now on your art over the past twenty years? Which parts were the most and least successful?

GER: I dunno. I think I'm still too close to it to have an impression other than, "I'm done!" There are some pages that I can barely stand to look at. Others, I look at and think, "Wow, who the hell was that guy? Why couldn't he draw like that more often?" The other week, I was going through a stack of artwork, putting them in order and storing them away and thinking, "Man, page after page after page of this stuff—that's a lot of work. Who the hell were these guys?"

Often the pages that I am reasonably happy with and, dare I say, proud of, are pages that get little or no reaction from people. I guess it's for the reader to decide which parts were the most and least successful.

FC: How did you go about creating the architecture of Cerebus's world?

GER: Usually I'd sit and stare at the page until something occurred to me. If something didn't occur to me, I'd go looking for ideas and reference material in some of the books Dave had around for that purpose. Or I'd head for the library. Then I'd sit and stare at the page some more until I could picture what it was I wanted to draw.

FC: How much did you discuss it with Dave?

GER: If Dave had something very specific in mind, we'd discuss it before I'd start

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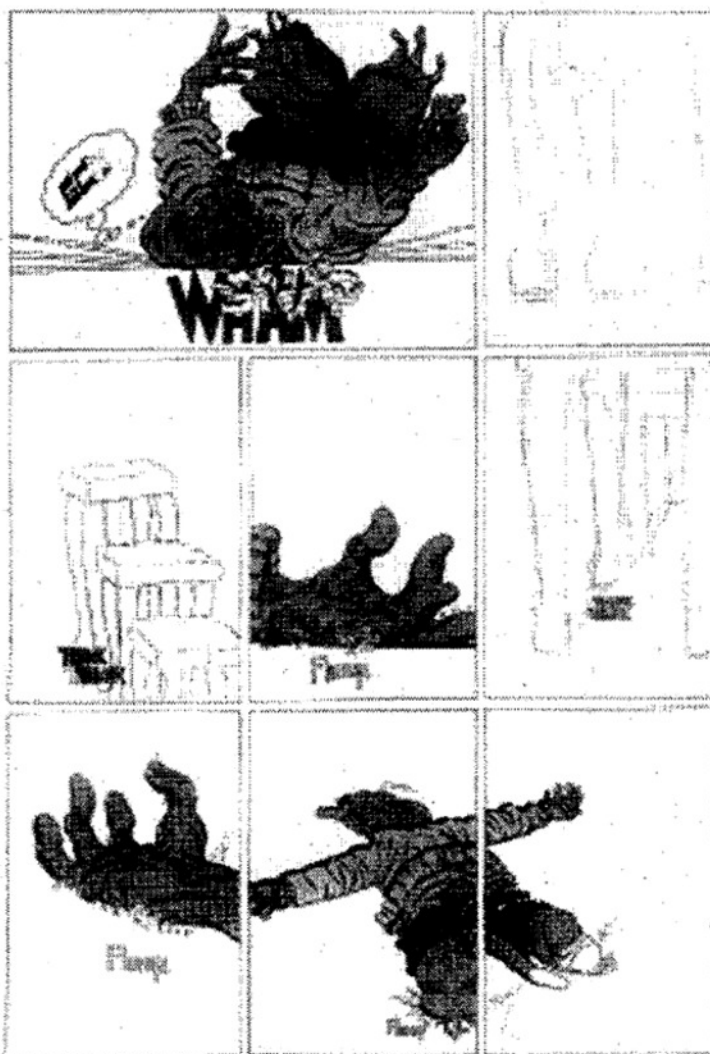
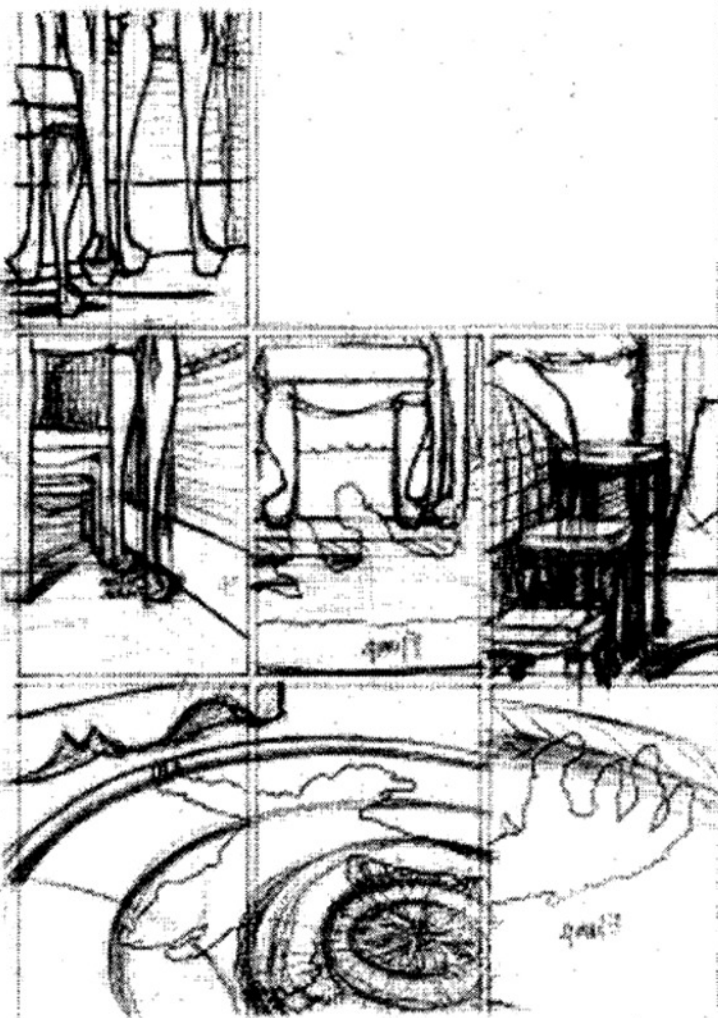
Illustrations on this and facing page show how Gerhard builds a Cerebus page: "I would first outline with marker on tracing paper all of the panel borders, word balloons, and characters that Dave had inked on the page. I would then remove the tracing paper, flip it, and draw on the other side. Then I'd flip it again, tape it back on the page with everything lined up, and then transfer the pencil from the back of the tracing paper onto the page by basically redrawing everything on the front of the paper. The pencils on the page could then be tightened up if necessary and then inked. Repeat twenty times a month."

Above: how the page (from Cerebus *300) looked when Dave passed it on to Gerhard.*

on the page. Or he would rough in things like tables or chairs. Or just write "window" in pencil beside Cerebus. Dave would also show me examples of other people's stuff. You know, Berni Wrightson, Al Williamson, Winsor McCay—those guys. Then he'd say, "Here, do it like this." Ya, right. As if.

FC: Did you need to be careful to avoid anachronisms?

GER: At times I was near paralyzed by my fear of anachronisms; I hate spiders. There were many times I chucked ideas because they just were not going to be consistent with the story. I'd be pencilling away, suddenly realize something, turn to Dave in the next studio and have to ask if there are clocks. I don't remember seeing any clocks before. He asks why. Because I'm drawing a clock on Jaka's dresser. He thinks about it. "Well it'll be the first one." I recall Dave telling me once that he spends a good part of his day justifying what I do. I'm not even sure what he meant by that, but I'm pretty sure it made my stomach hurt.

FC: At what point did you know how the storyline would end (aside from Cerebus's death)?

GER: When I saw page twenty of issue 300.

*FC: A while back Dave wrote about your talking him out of ending one of the earlier novels sooner than he'd planned (*Church & State*, perhaps?). How often did you and Dave discuss the entirety of a novel?*

GER: I don't think we ever discussed the entirety of a novel. The beginning, maybe, to set up the locations and the feel of the story. Then I was along for the ride like everyone else. I was on a need-to-know basis. I had told Dave when I started, just after I had finished reading the first sixty-four issues, that I kinda' regretted not being able to read *Cerebus* as a story now. So Dave didn't tell me what was going to happen, and I got to read the story one page at a time. That's probably why Dave spent so much time justifying what I did.

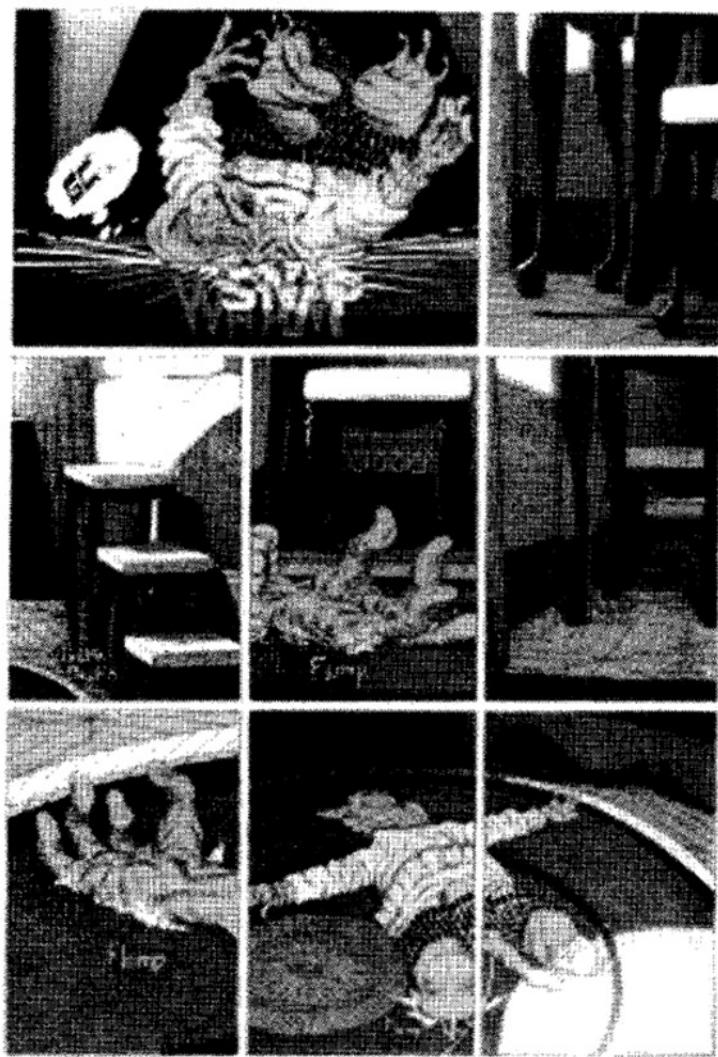
"If I tried to finish [the story], you would have ended up with something like: '—and then I woke up.'"

FC: What would you have done if Dave had been unable to complete the series to issue 300? He once suggested that you weren't a writer, and that your completing the Cerebus storyline on your own would have been like his trying to write a symphony. Is this an accurate comparison?

GER: That's probably pretty accurate. It's his story, always has been, always will be. If I tried to finish it, you would have ended up with something like: "—and then I woke up."

Although, I did have this strange sensation near the end of the book. It occurred to me that maybe the pressure of doing a monthly comic all by himself caused Dave's personality to split, and his mind created this background artist guy, and that I was just going to *poit* out of existence when I finished the last page. Sorta the opposite of "—and then I woke up."

FC: Some stories are very connected to their environments (such as Twin Peaks *and the American northwest), and others not as much. Where would you place* Cerebus *on the scale?*

GER: I think *Cerebus* is very connected to its environment; it's just that the environment doesn't exist. I like to think that we created a place that seems real enough. Dave writes characters that deserve to be treated as if they exist, and I tried to give them a tangible world in which to interact. With the photo covers for *Going Home*, a lot of people wanted to know where they were taken, and I started to compile a list. But it took away the mystery, I guess. I prefer that the photos remain representations of what they are supposed to be in the story, not of my

backyard or vacation pictures. I'm sorry, what was the question?

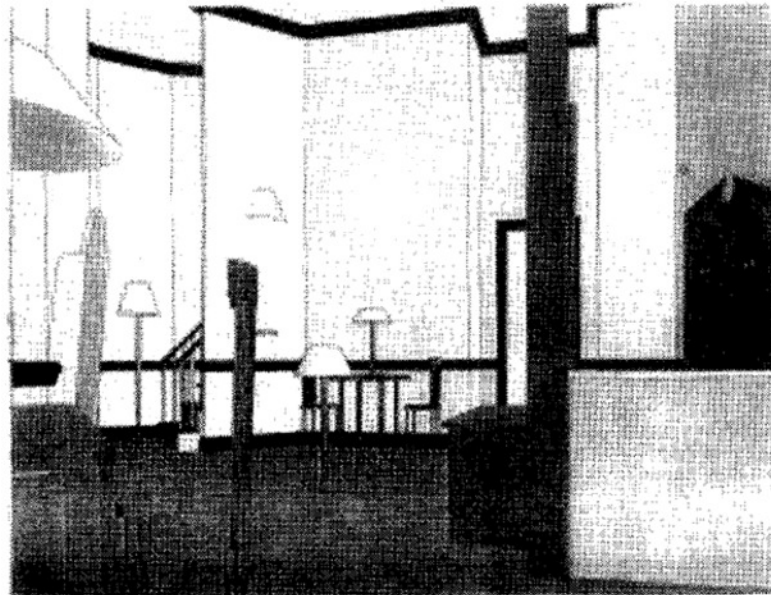
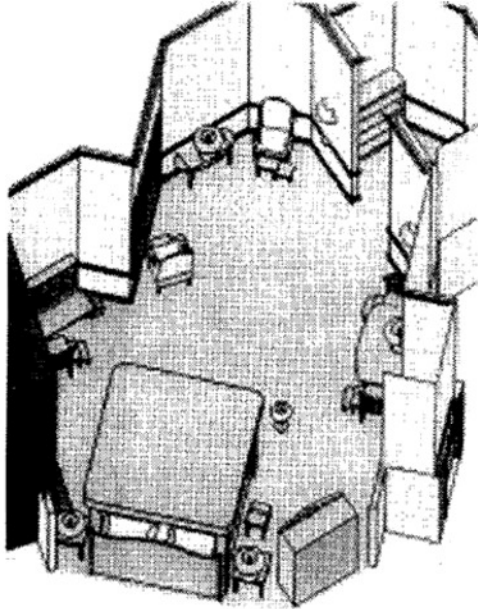
FC: Your first collaboration was the color "His First Fifth." Had you done much color art up to this time? Dave is a proponent of black-and-white art; how did the two of you work out the color format on that first story and the subsequent covers?

GER: At the time, I did a dozen or so illustrations that were pen and ink with watercolor. I had these framed and tried selling them in a couple showings. They were landscapes and such, things people might like to hang in their living room. The as yet unsold pieces were hanging on the walls at my place where Dave saw them. He asked me if he drew Cerebus and roughed in the rest of the page, would I be able to do something like these in behind? I said, I guess. A few days later he gave me the first page of "His First Fifth," and a day or so later I gave it back with the backgrounds on it. He said great, can you do it again? He handed me the next page. Repeat as necessary.

Above: one of only four pages Gerhard worked on in Cerebus *289/290.*
Below: two approaches to inking the same image.

FC: When you started working on Cerebus, *you weren't familiar with the comic book scene. How much do you keep up with other comics?*

GER: I have a few comics that are real favorites, and I look forward to their irregular arrival. I don't get into the comic shop very often and read mostly what people send us. Right now I have a box full of about seventy-five books. They are the entries for the next Gene Day prize. I plan on taking them up to the boat and laze around in the sun sipping cold drinks and reading comics. Hey! I got this far into the interview without mentioning my boat!

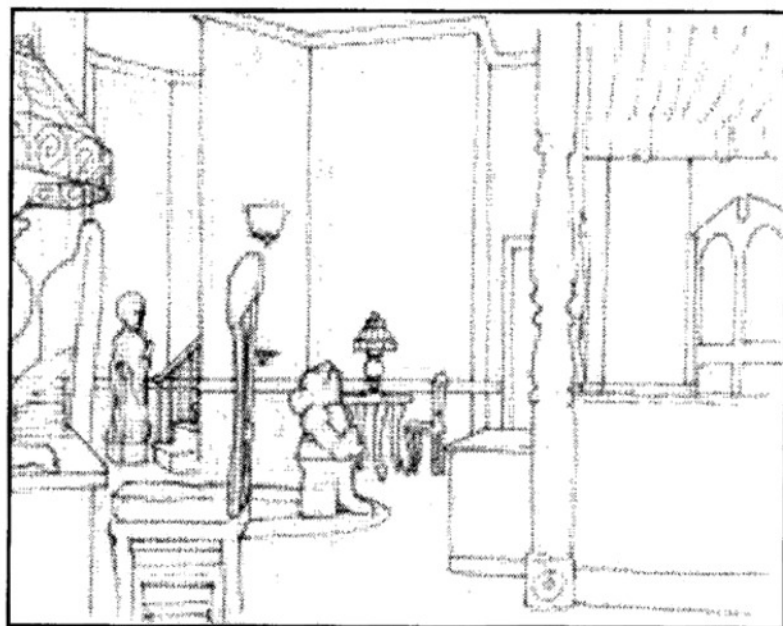
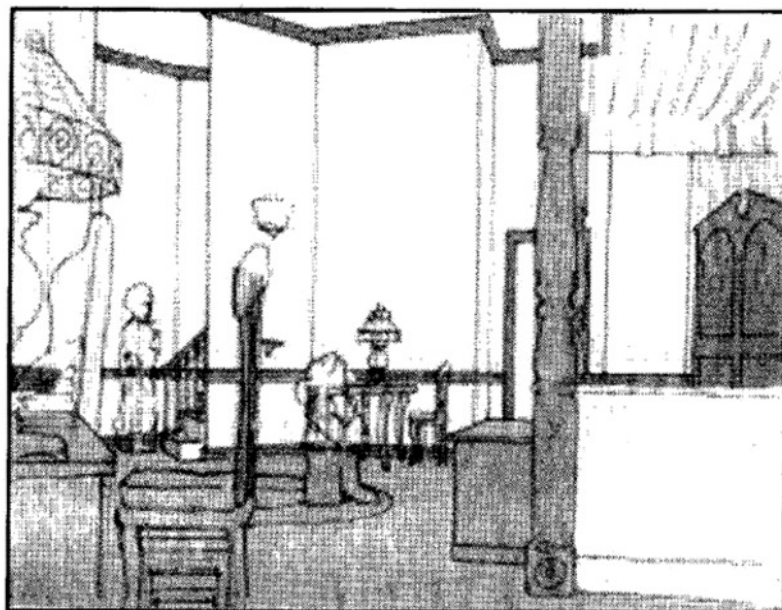
FC: Do you feel fairly knowledgeable about the history of

the medium by now?

GER: No, but when you work with someone like Dave, who is practically a comics historian, some of it is bound to wear off. Comics history through osmosis, that's me.

FC: What artists—comics or otherwise—have been most influential to you or work, or which artists do you simply enjoy the most?

GER: Of course the artist that has influenced me the most is Dave. His love for the medium. His dedication and persistence. His eye for design. His ability to perfectly place solid blacks. His ability to mimic other people's style and line work. The things he can get a Hunt 102 pen nib to do. His lettering. His pacing. You know, all that good s---.

FC: What are your future artistic plans?

GER: Well, I've taken up painting. I've painted the studio, the rec room, the downstairs bathroom, the work room, the fascia around the house, the siding, and the cockpit on the boat. The boat? That's twice. I'm outta here.

Above and top: computer designs for the Last Day *room. At right: another example of how Gerhard builds the backgrounds to a* Cerebus *scene.*

Editorial

(continued from inside front cover)

are represented by interviews this issue, along with producing the cover and supplying the rare artwork. Beginning next issue, Dave will be contributing an "About Last Issue" column, in which he "reviews" this first edition, perhaps discussing our feature essay, or responding to topics raised in the letters column, or—well, it's really up to him. We're as eager to see what he comes up with as everyone else surely will be. Dave has also agreed to make himself available for regular mini-interviews to address various topics that will be covered in upcoming issues. For instance, the feature essay in *FC2* will be storytelling, and we may fire off a few questions for him so that his observations appear in the same issue as the essay.

Because Dave is making himself so available, one may ask what, then, is the point of writing lengthy essays discussing various aspects of *Cerebus* and certain mysteries or controversies therein? For this first issue, for instance, we examine a recurring theme that has perplexed us for years—the references in the storyline to "Something Fell." Why not just ask Dave what the phrase means and be done with it?

Good question, and the answer will provide some insight as to just how we see our roles as critics, and how we view the relationship between art, artist, and audience.

II. Mysteries Explored and Mysteries Solved

One of the things that makes art so fascinating, so exciting, is its ability to inspire thought and provoke feelings. Without trying to narrow the scope of art or restrict what it can be or do by presenting a definition that limits it, surely one could safely say that great art often opens up unique areas of thought and experiences in the viewer, whereas simple craft usually does not. When a creative work not only provokes thought, but also addresses profound themes (such as "the human condition," as our English and Literature instructors would say), it garners acclaim.

The Passion: *anti-Semitic or not? (Jim Caviezel and Mel Gibson)*

Another fascinating aspect of art is that a "creative work" is just that: created. It has its own identity, its own existence, outside of its creator. It has its own logic, its own foundational principles, its own life, and as such, it inspires different reactions among different viewers, who see different things in it. Many accused Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* of promoting anti-Semitism. Others insisted that a more accurate viewing of the film promoted the opposite. How can one film be seen to promote opposing viewpoints? Because complex, challenging art often works that way. It opens up thoughts and emotions and experiences, and the viewers take those reactions and provide their own conclusions.

The Dark Knight: *pro-Facism or not? (Art by Frank Miller.)*

Even after Gibson stated clearly that neither his film nor his own beliefs showed evidence of anti-Semitism, his critics did not back down. To their minds, Gibson's views were, to a degree, irrelevant. The film stood on its own. If (they would maintain) anti-Semitism was *right there on the screen*, then it was there, case closed. No amount of discussion or evidence to the contrary could change their minds.

So are all interpretations of art—logical, illogical, well-reasoned, poorly-reasoned, intelligent, or absurd—equally valid? Some maintain that the Bible promotes racism, slavery, and violence. A few years ago, Frank Miller was dismayed that some

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Top: A Clockwork Orange *(with Malcolm McDowell): pro- or anti-Christian? Middle: Dolphin by Dave Stevens. Let's see—two arms, two eyes, two breasts, two thighs, and, oops, only one leg and foot! Bottom:* Huckleberry Finn*: racist or not? (Art by Barry Moser.)*

critics viewed *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* as pro-Fascism. Years before, feminists accused Harlan Ellison of being a misogynist because of his novella *A Boy and His Dog.* In 1984 the Ronald Reagan re-election team made "Born in the U.S.A." (by the mostly non-political Bruce Springsteen) into a Republican anthem. Is Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* an anti-Christian assault on the church or a pro-Christian reaffirmation of the doctrine of free will? We could go on and on, but a question arises:

© DC Comics

Who gets to decide?

Who gets to decide whether *The Passion* is anti-Semitic or not? Who gets to decide whether *The Dark Knight* is pro-Fascist or not? Who gets to decide whether *A Clockwork Orange* is anti-Christian or not? The artists? The critics? The informed viewers? The uninformed viewers who happen to stumble upon the work that day?

The practical reality is that we all do, because that's the way art works. We cannot argue how many pages the first Spider-Man story contains, or whether *The Dark Knight* was first published in 1986 or 1976. But is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a racist book? Who determines the "truth" about that if readers and critics are lined up on both sides?

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Presumably the ultimate authority for any work of art would be the artist, right? Frank Miller insists *The Dark Knight* is not pro-Fascist, and anyone who thinks that it is, is a sloppy reader. Harlan Ellison is not anti-woman. Mel Gibson is not anti-Semitic.

But is it possible that the artist—*any* artist, not necessarily those noted above—can interpret every aspect of his work from every possible legitimate viewpoint? Surely not. This is no slight to the artist. A person can have only so many experiences and study only so many different ideologies; yet the infinite variety of the relationships between different experiences and ideologies will create mindsets that approach works of art from a multitude of perspectives.

This, of course, is what can make criticism fascinating and give it a worthiness quite apart from the creation of an artifact. Good criticism—intelligent, interesting, and enlightening observations presented in well-written prose—is as rare as beautiful paintings or powerful films. And part of what makes good criticism interesting is that it does *not* come from the artist himself, and as such it can point out things that the artist himself did not notice, either because of the artist's own unique experiences and ideology, or possibly because he is too close to the work. (This need not be a "flaw" in the art, though every artist has had the experience of laboring over a piece, only to have a visitor—either another artist, or possibly even a casual viewer—immediately pinpoint a mistake overlooked by the artist. In the mid-eighties, Dave Stevens—a meticulous artist if ever there was one—contributed an illustration of Dolphin to *Who's Who in the DC Universe* 7 and forgot to draw her left leg! He would joke about it when signing copies at conventions.)

In *Spectrum* 7, we wrote a rather offbeat review of Michael Tolkin's fascinating film *The Rapture.* Tolkin intended it as an anti-Christian work. We argued that, while he may have *intended* it as such, he failed in that attempt; the film could better be interpreted an affirmation of at least some Christian beliefs.

Whatever the case, in the end the film stands on its own, as does *every* work of art. Tolkin inter-

preted the film one way. We interpreted it another way. Who's right? Or, perhaps better, who's "right"? When it comes to interpretation, is it even legitimate to ask questions of "right" and "wrong"?

David Lynch, a filmmaker whom we've studied at length, understands—and enjoys—this phenomenon. That's one reason why, in interviews, he rarely gives his own interpretations to his films. In part, he acknowledges that his is only one voice, and in the final analysis he has no more importance than anyone else in determining the meaning of a scene or a film. And besides, even if he did, and even if he were to present his interpretations of his films, the "right" interpretations, in an interview, he recognizes that, as a practical matter, he cannot sit with every audience member who will ever see the film and explain his views to that person. He can't be sure that every viewer will read the interview. He can't even be sure that every viewer will listen to the DVD audio commentary, if he were to do one. (We know lots of people who never bother watching the DVD "extras.") Short of a filmmaker emblazoning labels across the screen, Dick Tracy-like, to identify every symbolic item or explain every nuanced scene, every film stands on its own. Every viewer is going to interpret it slightly differently. For Lynch, this is not a "problem," but one of the exciting things about art.[1]

But there is more to it than that, and that is what gets us back to *Cerebus* and the "Something Fell" mystery.

For Lynch, mysteries provide inherent pleasures, but only so long as they remain mysteries. There is a unique thrill in seeking the answer to a mystery, and that thrill dissipates soon after the answer comes. The director said about *Twin Peaks*, "[T]he mystery was the magical ingredient. [Finding the answer to the mystery] killed the thing."[2]

But that's not the only result of solved mysteries. Sometimes, when the artist speaks, the search and the discussion ends.[3] It doesn't *have* to be this way. As noted above, the art is a separate entity and stands apart from the artist. But this distinction is rarely understood. A few years ago Lynch—in a rare revelation—stated that *Lost Highway* was inspired by the O.J. Simpson case. It made the movie much easier to understand, but it also virtually locked in a specific meaning to previously mysterious scenes, making it difficult to view the movie in any *other* way.

Once the curtain is pulled back, it's almost impossible to return it intact. That's why Lynch (and very few others) despise the trend toward "behind the scenes" and "making of" specials and DVD bonus features. Once you learn that the breaths of characters Rose and Jack in the *Titanic* movie were CGI'd in postproduction, it's difficult to submit to the illusion that they are floating in ice-cold Atlantic waters as the ship sinks.

In upcoming issues of *Following Cerebus*, you will see instances in which we resolve a mystery or obscure aspect of *Cerebus* by simply asking Dave, but there will be other times in which we want to explore a topic first, unencumbered by an assigned or imposed "answer."

So why didn't we just ask Dave what "Something Fell" means? Because we didn't want to know the answer quite yet. Seeking the answer (or *one* answer) is often more fun and ultimately more rewarding, and once Dave explains it, everyone may believe that the case has been closed and lose interest in continuing the search. It needn't be that way, but often that's the result.

We'll sum up with a perceptive quote by Mark Frost (co-creator, with Lynch, of *Twin Peaks*, and author recently of the acclaimed book *The Greatest Game Ever Played*). After admitting that viewers found things in *Twin Peaks* that the writers didn't intend, he says:

> "It's this weird thing...of how do you know when something's in your work and when it isn't? If someone sees it there—I mean, if they *see* it there, it must *be* there. Because for them it *is* there. It gets into a strange kind of gray area, then, where creativity becomes something that is shared, and the audience is using its own creativity in interpreting the material. I think that's kind of the magic of it."[4]

Craig Miller
John Thorne

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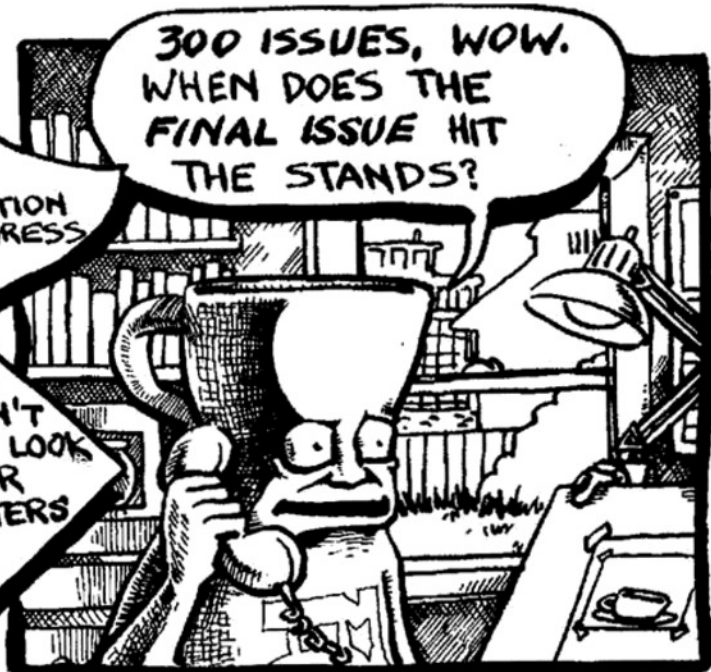
[1]So should the opinions of the film scholar and the drugged-out high school dropout have equal legitimacy? Are there no objective standards at all in evaluating art? That is a whole *other* debate that we can't address here. Isn't it true, however, that on a purely practical, everyday level, word-of-mouth and friend-talking-to-friend, the high school dropouts have more influence on the immediate reception a film receives—and hence on its box office—than the film scholars?

[2]Chris Rodley, ed., *Lynch on Lynch* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1997), p. 180.

[3]This did not apply in Mel Gibson's case in part because some in the debate had their own agendas separate from film analysis.

[4]David Bianculli, *Teleliteracy: Taking Television Seriously* (New York: Continuum, 1992), pp. 184-185.

DAVE SIM

BY SHANNON WHEELER

Another Thing Coming

NEWS & MORE

Cerebus Gets the CGC Treatment

Aardvark-Vanaheim and Paradise Comics (Toronto) are co-ordinating a plan to have premium-condition copies of Cerebus "slabbed" by Comics Guarantee Corporation (CGC). Over the past few years, collectors have responded favorably to graded-and-encapsulated issues, in part because it allows for greater confidence in mail order and eBay purchases that the comics are in the condition advertised. As such, CGC comics bring significantly higher prices than non-CGC issues in the same conditions.

One hundred copies of Cerebus 300 have been selected to be included in the CGC Signature Series, the only authenticated signature service in comics. (Previous books in the series include Captain America 1 by John Cassaday, Catwoman 1 by Darwyn Cooke, and Spider-Man: Blue 1 by Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale.) Peter Dixon, owner of Paradise Comics, selected the best hundred copies from five hundred provided by the printer, and those hundred will be forwarded to CGC after being signed by Dave Sim and Gerhard. The "Own a Piece of Issue 300" edition will be previewed on the Paradise Web site (www.paradisecomics.com) before being offered on eBay (beginning with #91-#100). Eventually they will work their way down to #1, with the money from the first five numbered copies going to charities picked by Sim, Gerhard, and Dixon.

In addition to the copies of Cerebus 300, CGC will also be slabbing the A-V file copies of the entire Cerebus run that Sim set aside beginning with the first issue. (He set aside twenty copies of each after hearing that Bill Gaines saved multiple copies of each E.C. comic fresh from the printer.) Because of the expense involved in getting all of the file copies processed, it will be done in stages. The first group will contain six copies of each of the first twenty-five issues, two copies each of the next fifty, and one copy each up to issue 135.

Sim graciously decided that the highest-graded copy of Cerebus 1 would be auctioned at the Toronto Comicon on June 19 to benefit A.C.T.O.R. (A Commitment To Our Roots, an organization formed to benefit veteran comic book creators in need of financial assistance). Sim said, "Ger and I have been so lucky in the comic book field, it's time to share some of that luck with the guys who came before us who weren't so lucky. We stand on the shoulders of giants." The issue (which graded 9.4 out of a possible 10.0) brought in an astounding $10,600 (U.S.), and interest is high in the remaining issues, though it will take time to get them all out.

Curious about the purchaser of this first issue, we contacted him—Chris Bell, president of Affordable 2nd Thoughts in Vancouver—to see what he had to say about obtaining such a prime collectible. It turns out he had also purchased file copies of Cerebus 2-5.

"I have been an active collector/fan/dealer of Cerebus since the late seventies and early eighties, when I first enjoyed this little character's adventures and mis-adventures. I believe I still have

Sim: "Ger and me signing the file copies in his second floor Office of the Vice-President which, prior to this, had been used only for year-end meetings with our accountants. I set it up that way so that they would understand Gerhard's importance at Aardvark-Vanaheim. See? We're sitting in his office. He's the one behind the big desk. I'm the one in the big armchair in the corner. It works pretty well. They know they have to talk to both of us this way."

Sim: "Peter Dixon of Paradise Comics in the second floor business office pre-screening the one hundred copies of issue 300 that Ger and I would sign and number and which Peter would then submit for CGC grading. Paul Litch of CGC then pulled out ten copies that he didn't think were of a high enough caliber, which he then replaced with his own candidates. The result? Forty-nine copies graded 9.6, and 51 copies graded 9.8. At the end of March, the 9.8-graded #100-out-of-100 sold on eBay for around $162 (U.S.)."

issues 2 onward from the old days, but not in the premium grade of recent acquisitions, of course. I enjoy purchasing key and semi-key books and runs in premium CGC grade or best-in-existence-to-date for future returns, but I do have over 200,000 reading copies at my disposal. There is a strong possibility that I may open a gallery of collectibles in the very near future where the Cerebus run would be exhibited. Although I have not read many comics over the last ten years or so due to family and business commitments, I do have a nice nest egg of material ready for my retirement. I think of drinking cool refreshments under a hot sun in a tropical place with a stack of comics (Cerebus and others) at my side. What could be better? I enjoy a variety of characters that I fondly remember reading in my younger years, like Conan the Barbarian, the X-Men, Richie Rich, etc. I have always appreciated both art and story content. The Signature Series File Copies were purchased primarily to hold, but if the right situation presents itself from another serious fan/collector, I would consider parting with them, but not individually as they were originally sold to me; I will keep the first five issues as a set. If issues 6 through 10 present themselves, I may consider adding them also. (He-hem!)"

Bell's Affordable 2nd Thoughts had been in business for over sixteen years. Though he deals in all areas of antiques, art, collectibles, and memorabilia, he has a special passion for the comics field.

Collectors interested in the next group of CGC'd issues of Cerebus should stay tuned to the Paradise site.

Sim, Gerhard Receive Lifetime Achievement Award

Dave Sim and Gerhard's first post-300 convention appearance occurred on April 3 at S.P.A.C.E. (Small Press and Alternative Comics Expo) in Columbus, Ohio, where they were presented with the First Annual SPACE Lifetime Achievement Award. Also that day, Sim presented his 2004 Howard E. Day Prize to Glenn Brewer for Askari Hodari (and Short List recipients Matt Dembicki, Justin Mad-son, Farel Dalrymple, and Chad Lambert). Also attending were a number of folks from the Yahoo Cerebus mailing list (see accompanying photo).

At right: the Yahoo! Cerebus Mailing List members at S.P.A.C.E. in Columbus.
Back row: Jason Trimmer, V., Dan Parker, Larry Hart, Mike.
Middle row: Tony Palermo, Chris W., Margaret (and Gerhard).
Front row: Steve Bolhafner, Josh Flowers, Lenny, John L.
(Photo courtesy of Dan Parker and shot by someone not in the photo—Dave, perhaps?)

Mind Games

Write to us at:
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Back in March, we (with Hal Brandt's assistance) invited participants in the Yahoo Cerebus group to write to us their reactions to the end of the Cerebus *series for this first issue. If you missed our first deadline, drop us a line for the next issue. We'd also love to hear what you think about this first issue of* Following Cerebus!

Dear *Following Cerebus*,

"You can get what you want and still not be very happy" has been the running gag in *Cerebus*, both for the character and the reader. It can probably be traced back to even the very early issues, as Cerebus is continually disappointed in his pursuits even when he accomplishes his goals. The readers' disappointments come up, meanwhile, in tantalizing stories like "What Happened Between Issues 20 and 21," where Dave responds to the fanboy's need to know more about that gap by showing what happened but actually explains nothing. More recently *Going Home* gives Cerebus and the fans what they have long wanted—extended time alone with Jaka—and the whole experience is an awkward time, alternatively happy and frustrating, and ultimately unfortunate. Issue 300 is the final statement of this theme. Cerebus finally gets to shake off his miserable existence, only to head into eternity separated from the God he has come to love. The readers, meanwhile, get this lovely 2 page "good-bye" to the memorable characters who have populated the series—only to realize it means Cerebus is going to Hell.

It's a satisfying end because it remains true to Dave's overall purpose. He didn't chicken out. We all knew Cerebus would die "unmourned and unloved" but never expected that that wouldn't be the worst part of it. Dave has written that he wanted the entire book to portray his view of the truth as close as he could get to it. I think he's done this. Over and over we see that there are big and usually bad consequences to Cerebus's decisions and actions. He never learns, despite lesson after lesson, that he always has a choice, and he usually picks the wrong one. He never considers the long term consequences. Often it's because he isn't aware of the potential consequences. I think Dave has expressed that this is the way we live our lives. We make selfish choices every day without considering the ripples and effects of those actions, if we are even aware that there will be consequences. The state of the world as Cerebus leaves it is a direct consequence of actions and choices in his past. What possible long term consequences in our society are we causing with the little decisions we make each day? I think this is what Dave is trying to get at in pieces like "Tangent," "Islam, My Islam," "Why Canada Slept," and his statements about submitting to the will of God. In the end, the only right choices, Dave is saying, are the ones that are made out of submission to the will of God. This requires fervent and frequent prayer (see Dave's prayer on the inside back cover, 4th "paragraph" from the end) as well as careful consideration. At the time of his death, Cerebus seems to have spent much of his last hundred years or so living in submission to God, and even then it seems that he makes a last impulsive choice that damns him.

Three cheers to Dave Sim for pursuing his vision so consistently and engagingly in his art for such a long time. It is rare that an artist commit to such a long-term attempt at a project like this, through (relative) commercial success and failure, through acceptance and vilification alike, and it is more rare that that artist is successful. I think Dave has done it, and I hope posterity reflects this.
Michael Grabowski
Lake Forest, CA
(e-mail)

Dear *Following Cerebus*,

I could title this "Dave Sim and *Cerebus:* A View From A Broad."

Part the First:

I suppose I must confess that I initially picked up *Cerebus* back in the early eighties for the *ElfQuest* parody. I do not collect *ElfQuest* anymore. (I occasionally wondered WTF happened there. One day I noticed Richard Pini in a photograph with a bunch of NY Vampires and realized I simply did not care anymore.)

Such was not the case with *Cerebus*/Dave Sim. Issue 52 was the door into a whole other world in terms of comic appreciation for me. No one has yet, in my opinion, been able to touch Dave in terms of sheer consistency of maintaining my interest. Say what you like about Sim, the guy's work is not dull.*

The world he created for *Cerebus* is so full of complexities that fans can interpret and debate

ideas for decades to come. Just try to explain *Cerebus* in a few words to someone unfamiliar with it. You find that it's rather difficult. The best I could ever do was:

Me: It's about an aardvark who begins as a mercenary soldier, then becomes Prime Minister, then a stable cleaner, then Pope, then a bartender, then a hostage, and then a Religious leader, and then, um—

<Insert blank stare from non-*Cerebus* reader here.>

Me: Look, trust me when I say that it's brilliant. Just read it. *Batman* you can explain. *Spider-Man* you can explain. Most comics are easy to describe, since most comics (especially superhero storylines) are formula driven. *Cerebus* never fit into any easily defined category, so trying to slap a label on Dave is equally difficult. The labels overlap, and most do not stick at all.

Who is Dave? Artist. Writer. Publisher. Yes. But wait, there's more. Madman. Genius? Patriot? Anti-feminist? Hmmm.

Who is the label for, except us? It is human nature to want to categorize or stereotype people. Does it make any difference what Dave is really about if we keep buying his work?

Dave did exactly what he said he was going to do, and that is worthy of respect. As a writer, his "job" was to entertain, and that he did. That he did not fall into a stagnant formula and kept pushing the boundaries (despite losing a large part of his audience because "he wasn't funny anymore") is also worthy of respect.

Part the Second:

Cerebus is endlessly interesting to me because Dave has been able to publish his book without fear. There was no Big Comic Company threatening to downsize him or replace him with a younger, cheaper artist. There was no editor telling him that what he wrote was politically incorrect and to change it or find another job. There was no barrier to his creativity, no restraints except any he placed upon himself.

I know of very few artists who can say they have worked without fear or without barriers and yet with such total dedication. I am seeing Dave's artistic influence on the next generation of comic books and am glad of it. It all comes back to being able to publish with complete freedom. We are all free to publish in this way, but few of us will ever take full advantage of this. Dave took all the risks for *Cerebus* and proved it could be done. As a writer and artist, I will always be truly grateful for that.

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* I know, I know. But "Chasing YHWH" is still better than watching Reality TV.

Whether you agree or disagree with any of Dave's views/beliefs is irrelevant to his work as a whole. Economics is the ultimate deciding factor here and everywhere. If you don't like it, then don't buy it. If no one buys the book, the author hasn't lost any freedom of expression; it's just that he couldn't gain an interested, paying audience. It was Dave's investment of creativity, time, and money that made *Cerebus* 1 possible. It was a paying audience that made *Cerebus* 300 possible. There were no artsy fartsy grants funding *Cerebus.* Dave did it on his own, for good or ill, and it shows. (If the Governor General of Canada wants to throw $15,000 at a "performance artist" who sprays blood on Picassos, I suppose that's her prerogative, if it's her money. However, using taxpayer dollars for such drivel does not sit well with me.)

Cerebus is far more worthy of my time and consideration than most of the crap that is considered "art" these days. Perhaps one day *Cerebus* will be considered a piece of English literature worthy of study at universities. Perhaps. All I know it that *Cerebus* is good. Really, really good. I cannot thank Dave and Gerhard enough for all their incredibly hard work.

Elizabeth Bardawill
Smiths Falls, Canada
(e-mail)

Dear *Following*,

You asked for some initial reactions to issue 300, as well as general thoughts about the series as a whole:

There is no possible way not to feel disappointed or even let down by the last issue, no matter what Dave might have chosen to do with it. I spent one year breathlessly awaiting the last issue (try *that* some time), then missed the release date by a week, then found myself very reluctant to actually read it, having finally bought the book. But read it, I did. I was intrigued—

Given Dave's stated goals, I believe that he accomplished what he wanted to do within the parameters of a twenty-page final issue. I believe that he did so in his usual multi-layered fashion (always sneaking a lot of stuff in), and I believe that he did so very well.

Was I satisfied? Yes. Cerebus died "alone, unmourned and unloved." To that end, Dave did right by his storyline, in his typical end-run sort of way. (And God bless Dave for "(Fart) Thank you God." Cerebus's last living wish was granted.)

But also, I was dissatisfied, only because I believe that Dave short-changed us somewhat by leaving the Sheshep storyline, as well as the imminent threat of Muslims to come, open-ended. I suppose that Dave has hedged his bets to some

degree, should the market in prayer mat futures ever bottom out (yeah, bad joke), so that he could eventually come back and tell those stories. I don't expect to see that, however.

Okay, overall series: Brilliant. Frustrating. Challenging. Insulting. Eye-opening. Hilarious. Stultifying. Confusing. Mortifying. Psssssant. Sad. Uplifting. Religious. Profane. Boring. Scatological. Profound. Groundbreaking; mountain-moving.

Transcendent.

It was a remarkable, epic story.

Jeff Seiler
Richardson, TX

Cerebus Followers,

Well, here I am, two months since the end of the longest running independent comic book series in history. I was so emotionally charged at the end of the series, I thought it best not to send a letter right away. I was afraid of coming off as a raving, drooling fan boy wrapped up in the moment without any real perspective on the event. Well, I'm happy to tell you that the magic has *not* faded. I feel so lucky to have been, and to *still* be a part of the *Cerebus* community.

It seems like it started so innocently. A funny book featuring a violent little aardvark with delusions of grandeur. But the book evolved, just as the readership evolved. Gone were the black-and-white-boom-anthropomorph fans, replaced with a fanbase so intelligent as to be at odds with the creator, yet enraptured by the creation. I tried my best to keep up, and *Cerebus* was the *only* book I never lapsed on in all my years of collecting.

Cerebus challenged me as no other comic ever has, and it still holds mysteries. Not only was the story proper a "roller coaster ride" of epic proportions, but the accompanying essays in later years were eye openers as well. I am still amazed at how far Dave Sim let us into his thoughts. Even in the midst of half-formed ideas, he writes with a passion and intelligence second to none. Therein lies a secret gift—the ability to separate the creator from the creation. Then Mr. Sim blurred the line. Then erased it. Then re-drew it in permanent ink.

Was it madness? Genius? Or a mix of both? Whatever the case may be, I remain a *Cerebus* fan *and* a Dave Sim fan. Yes, I disagree with many of his views. I *agree* with many of them, too. Hopefully there are more controversial essays to come, and maybe one day Mr. Sim will give us another creation to follow.

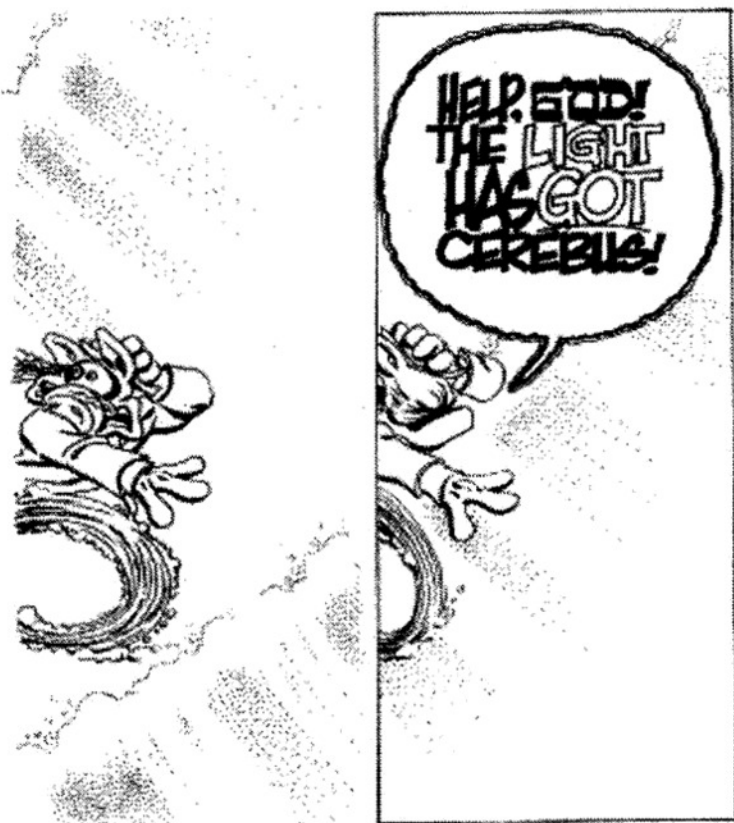
In the fullness of time, however, I believe *Cerebus* will be held in the highest regard alongside the greatest creations of Kirby, Eisner, Ditko, and the like. Perhaps that's enough.

Jeffrey Tundis
Warwick, RI
(e-mail)

Hi:

It's been a few weeks now since issue 300 came out, and I'm still coming to terms with the ending. Partially because I wish it had been happier. Partially because of its implications for all of us.

I was surprised and disappointed with Cerebus himself, that the little fellow would forget his faith once he saw Jaka, although he seemed to recover quickly when he realized Rick wasn't among those beckoning him toward the light. I'd take this to mean that his love of God was stronger than his love of Jaka, but by this point he'd already been caught by whatever...tractor beam...the light was exerting on his soul, so he was unable to reach escape velocity and get away. Reminds me of issue 288/289 and its concept of souls being pulled in to the center of the Sun. Get too close to any astronomical body that's big enough (especially a star), and you're going to get either locked into permanent orbit, or dragged toward its center and destroyed. I guess that by getting too close to Jaka, he'd been stuck in orbit around her during his life, and destroyed by her in death.

I keep thinking of the song "Bad Obsession"

from the *Use Your Illusion* two-CD set by Guns 'n' Roses (a project that served as an autopsy of—and funeral for—vocalist Axl Rose's failed relationship with model Stephanie Seymour). The line that really comes to mind is, "I can't stop thinkin' 'bout seein' ya one more time / Oh no / But I already left you, and you're better off left behind."

If I had to pick out a Biblical parallel to Cerebus's fate, it'd be the story of Samson in the Book of Judges. Samson's a seemingly invincible warrior who falls in love with Delilah, a hooker in Gaza. The folks who hate Samson ask Delilah to discover the source of his strength so they can destroy him. She sweet talks him, asks him his secret, and he makes up a story to see if she'll use the information against him. Sho' 'nuff, she betrays him, Samson kicks the ass of the Philestine hit men who've come to kill him, and he...flees the country? No. He stays with her. They repeat this crap two more times. Finally, rather than up and run from Deliliah, Samson tells her the truth, that if you cut his hair, his strength is lost. Snip snip. He's captured, his eyes are gouged out, and when his hair grows back after weeks of torture and humiliation, he earns the least dishonorable death left to him by pulling down the pillars of the building that he's bound to, killing himself and about three thousand people within.

I remember commiserating over the phone with the Irish rock singer Bob Geldof about bad relationships, saying a lot of us are walking around eyeless in Gaza hoping for something better in the future. Bob's comment: "You're a fookin' Jesuit, man." But the point of the Samson & Delilah story —which never was explained in the Sunday School education we received on Long Island—is the same point of the Cerebus and Jaka story: It's stupid and dangerous to put your trust in people who've already betrayed your trust. That goes for both Cerebus and Jaka. They did a number on each other over and over again.

I still think that Cerebus's moment of clarity once he noticed Rick was absent speaks in his favor. He did realize it was a mistake to go toward the light. He did put his faith before his emotions. He did try to get away. It was entirely in character for him to act rashly at first, but this time, he corrected himself. He didn't need some outside force to set him straight. I wish that had been enough, that the second to last page of 300 had shown him yanking himself out of the light, huffing and puffing in relief, and sighing, "Whew. I made it." I wish he had.

Claude Flowers
Kent, WA
(e-mail)

("Something Fell" continued from page 25)

ing in the air, until he realizes that Rick is not present. He tries to escape but cannot and gets pulled into the light and whatever afterlife that represents. Finally, it appears, Cerebus has the ultimate answers about life and death.

What, then, can we conclude from these three instances (or at least the first two)? That in the Cerebus storyline, an ascension brings enlightenment—even if it comes in degrees (a necessary evil of a story that is written over a twenty-six-year period and incorporates the changing beliefs of the author). So the entire epic presents three distinct "states." Ascension (understanding), remaining in place (static existence), and falling (confusion and death). And at various times, Cerebus himself exhibits all three states.[11]

Ascension is more than just the opposite of falling, however; in the storyline the two are inevitably linked. The Black Tower rises—allowing for the Ascension—but becomes unstable and falls onto the city below. The aforementioned "fallen bride" story in *Going Home* is actually called "Raising Up the Bride." Likewise, Cerebus's "ascension" in issue 300 is not only intrinsically linked to his death as the result of a fall, but may, in fact, represent a spiritual "fall" as he finds himself not in the heaven he imagined, but—somewhere else.

The eventual location of his soul, however, is a topic for another day.

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[11]And roughly in that order throughout the entirety of the series (with *Jaka's Story* and *Melmoth* representing Cerebus's "static" states.

CRAIG- I DON'T ACTUALLY USE BLUE PENCIL ANYMORE BUT I THINK IT'LL MAKE IT LOOK MORE LIKE ORIGINAL ARTWORK

FOLLOWING CEREBUS

CAN'T WE FIT SOME MORE USELESS TYPESETTING ON HERE? IT'S SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE A COMIC BOOK COVER?

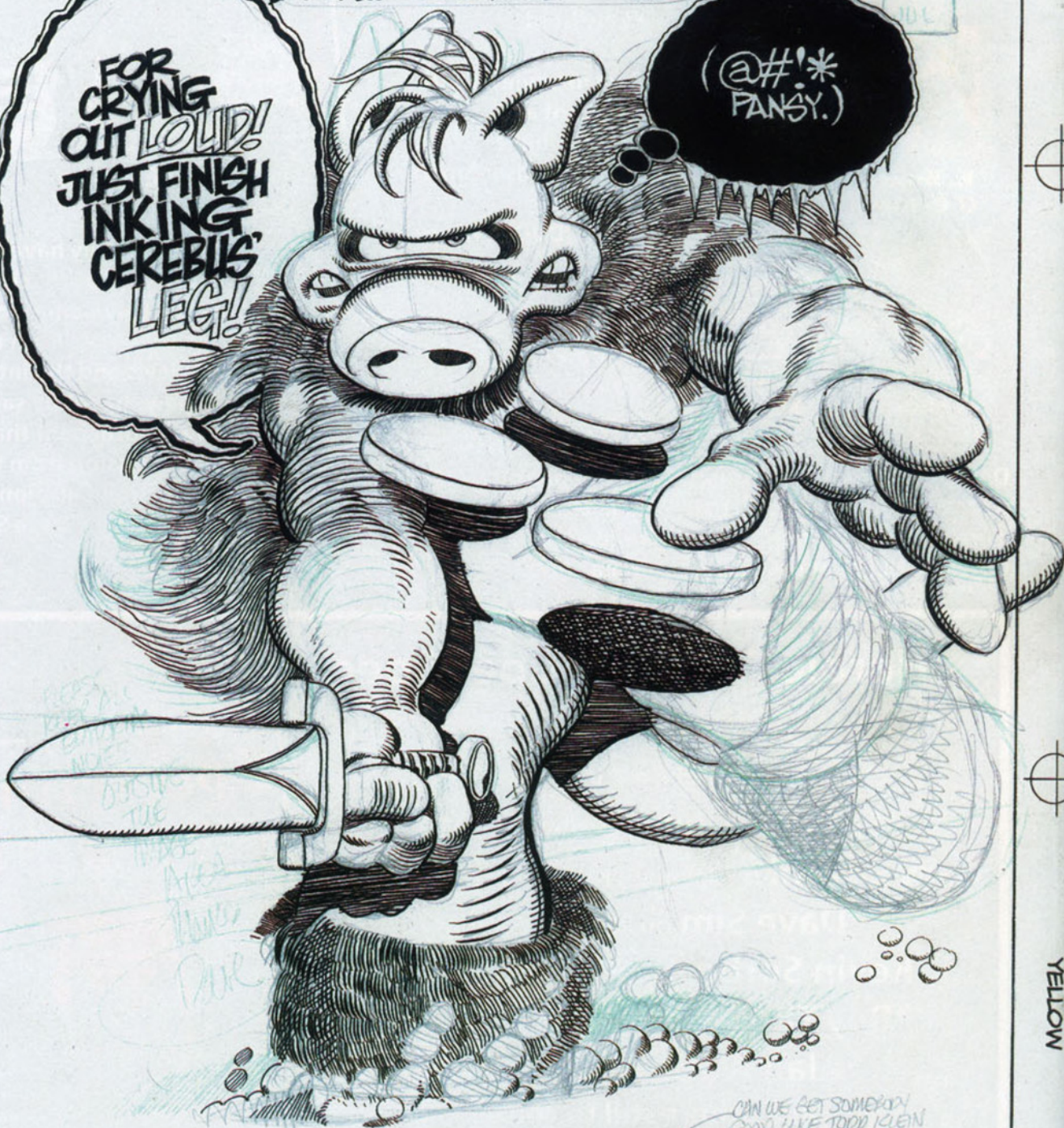
1

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD! JUST FINISH INKING CEREBUS' LEG!

(@#!*
PANSY.)

MAGENTA

← NOTE - REAL REGISTER MARKS AREN'T DRAWN ON BY HAND LIKE THESE →

CYAN

BLACK

YELLOW

CAN WE GET SOMEBODY GOOD LIKE TODD KLEIN TO LETTER THIS?

FANTASTIC FIRST WIN-MILL ISSUE